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AN ONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE APPLIED TO THE INTERPRETATION  
OF SAUL BELLOW'S HENDERSON THE RAIN KING

by

Judy Lee Svore

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the  
DEPARTMENT OF SPEECH COMMUNICATION  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
In the Graduate College  
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

I hereby recommend that this dissertation prepared under my  
direction by JUDY LEE SVORE  
entitled AN ONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE APPLIED TO THE INTERPRE-  
TATION OF SAUL BELLOW'S HENDERSON THE RAIN KING  
be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the  
degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_

*Judy Lu Hase*

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## ABSTRACT

A traditional dilemma in literary criticism, oral interpretation and analysis in modern psychotherapy has been to deny the separation of subject and object (form and content) and at the same time to adhere to the dichotomy in actual critical practice. The problem in literary criticism and in oral interpretation of how the reader is to participate in the reality of a literary work cannot be solved by exterior methodologies. Clarification of the relationships represented by reader, author, and persona can be accomplished by an awareness of the existential-ontological situation. Like an interpretative act an existential-ontological attitude toward literature originates within the participating self of the reader as a unique being-in-the-world. As such, the ontological approach is rooted in the fact that the psychological and physiological processes of the "self" of the reader are inseparably bound within any act of his understanding. Accordingly, this study attempts to demonstrate the value of an ontological approach as a tool for undercutting the subject-object dilemma in the interpretation of Saul Bellow's Henderson the Rain King.

If the contemporary prose work is to be accessible, then the contemporary interpreter should regard it not as

an object with which he has no essential connection, but, instead, as a sensory experience that expresses his particular being-in-the-world. Proceeding from the assumption of common concern shared by the contemporary interpreter and the contemporary American prose work, the concern with being, with the human struggle to transcend the sense of alienation from self in the modern world, the present writer first examines the relationship between the existential-ontological approach and contemporary interpretation theory and prose literature and then presents an analysis of Saul Bellow's Henderson the Rain King demonstrating how this novel can be interpreted existentially from the perspective of the interpreter's ontological concern in the work.

For the purpose of this study the particular existential-ontological views of Martin Heidegger served as the originating point for the discussion of the relationship between the ontological attitude and interpretation theory and for the analysis of the Bellow novel. In an application of Heidegger's concepts of being-in-existence to interpretation, the work of literature is an act, not a thing, and the interpreter a participant-observer intent on discovering how the work reveals itself through his own being and becoming.

The objective of the existential-ontological approach is to avoid the tendency of interpreters to regard

themselves as subjects, as thinking beings separate from their world and from the literary works they are analyzing. The existential-ontological approach also avoids the tendency of readers to regard works of literature as objects or signs for various ideas, a predisposition that leads either to a rational or to a sentimental relationship between the reader and the literary work.

This study assumes first that a direct encounter between the work and its reader is possible and that it can be discussed without damaging the work's literary value. Secondly, it assumes that this encounter depends upon the reader's approaching the work from the point of view that he has a concern in it, that the work is about himself; in this respect, the reader enters the work not through rationalistic distancing or sentimental identification but through a self-critical attitude which seeks to establish how the work focuses the transcendent quality of being. The final assumption of the study is that the success of the application of the ontological perspective depends upon the degree of self-consciousness of the reader, the degree to which he is able to distinguish himself from his own assumptions and roles in the continual evolving of his own being.

## CHAPTER I

### THE NATURE OF THE STUDY

#### Introduction to the Study

##### In The Perception and Evocation of Literature

Leland H. Roloff says that interpretation is an engagement with a vulnerable self; it is a somatic-thinking--that is, thinking, intuiting, and feeling about literature with the whole self. To trust in judgments of the "feeling-filled soul" is difficult, as Roloff acknowledges, since "the soul has been out of fashion" in recent education.<sup>1</sup> The holistic position of the nature of man, however, is being reconsidered by writers of recent interpretation books (such as Roloff) just as it is being argued again by writers in psychiatry, psychology, anthropology, and sociology. This study pertains to that trend in recognition of the fact that prose literature comprises an intangible nexus uniting man with himself.

A traditional dilemma in oral interpretation, literary criticism, and analysis in modern psychotherapy has been to deny the separation of subject and object (i.e., of form and content or texture and structure) and

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1. Leland H. Roloff, The Perception and Evocation of Literature (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1973), p. 3.

at the same time to adhere to the subject-object dichotomy in actual critical practice. As Rollo May says in

Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology:

The problem is how we are to understand the other person's world. It cannot be understood as an external collection of objects which we view from the outside (in which case we really never understand it), nor by sentimental identification (in which case our understanding doesn't do any good, for we have failed to preserve the reality of our own existence). . . . What is required is an approach to world which undercuts the "cancer,"<sup>2</sup> namely, the traditional subject-object dichotomy.

Seventeen years earlier than May, John Crowe Ransom called for a similar approach to the interpretation of literature in his work, The New Criticism. He says, at the end of the book, that we need an ontological critic, that is, a critic who can understand the being of a literary work. Ransom's assertion reveals his dissatisfaction with discussing a poem in terms of texture and structure. Such explication necessitates discovering what the texture of of the poem--its imagery, rhythm, and so on--has to do with the structure, the logical argument of the poem, especially since texture and structure tend to obscure each other. The mystery, as Ransom observes, is that in this obscurity lies the poem itself. Though Ransom condemns the Platonic view of the poem as simply an illustration of ideas, his inability to solve the texture-structure problem illustrates

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2. Rollo May (ed.), Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1958), p. 56.



the tendency of critics to deny the separation of form and content and yet to adhere to the subject-object division in critical practice.<sup>3</sup>

The reason the endeavor to reconsider man as being is important is that it strikes the acute problem of contemporary life, namely, that modern man has lost his world and sense of community. Like contemporary American novelists of the second half of the twentieth century, analysts in modern psychotherapy have found that among the sources of contemporary man's anxiety and despair are his loss of sense of being and his loss of his world. Twentieth century man not only experiences alienation from the human world about him but also suffers an inner conviction of being estranged in the natural world as well. Contemporary analysts who adhere to the existential psychotherapy movement believe it necessary and possible to have a science of man which studies human beings in their reality.

The existentialists are centrally concerned with rediscovering the living person amid the compartmentalization and dehumanization of modern culture. . . . Their concern is not with isolated psychological being of the man who is doing the experiencing. That is to say, they use psychological terms with an ontological meaning.<sup>4</sup>

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3. John Crowe Ransom, The New Criticism (Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1941), pp. 279-336.

4. May, Existence, pp. 14-15.

Similarly, the problem in both literary criticism and oral interpretation of how the reader is to participate in the reality of a literary work cannot be solved by abstraction or by detached terminology. Clarification of the relationships represented by reader, author, and persona can be accomplished by an awareness of the existential-ontological situation--the real, living relationship, since in dealing with human beings, no truth has reality by itself; it is always dependent upon the reality of the immediate relationship.<sup>5</sup>

Proceeding from the assumption of common concern shared by the contemporary interpreter and the contemporary American prose work, namely, the concern with being, with the human struggle to transcend the sense of alienation from self in the modern world, one can usefully employ a critical attitude that undercuts the subject-object dilemma by referring instead to a critical basis of how the work focuses the transcendent quality of being.

The objective of an existential-ontological approach is to avoid the tendency of readers to regard themselves as subjects, as thinking beings separate from their world and from the literary works they are analyzing. The existential-ontological approach also avoids the tendency of readers to regard works of literature as

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5. May, Existence, p. 27.

objects or signs for various ideas, a predisposition that leads either to a rational or a sentimental relationship between the reader and the literary work. A subject-object relationship between the interpreter and a prose work makes the work itself, for the most part, inaccessible, because the interpreter is either identifying it with some abstract truth (a paraphrasable statement about it) or he is subjectivizing his experience by associating himself with the emotions of the work. Regarded either as abstract truth or as subjective emotional experience, the prose work as a living experience disappears and becomes only a sign for an idea, a feeling, or a pattern of behavior. The interpreter and the literary work remain essentially uninvolved, locked in a static relationship.

If the contemporary American prose work is to be accessible, then the contemporary interpreter should regard it, not as an object with which he has no essential connection but, instead, as a sensory experience that expresses his particular being-in-the-world. Within the framework of dual concern between the disciplines of the contemporary interpreter and the contemporary American prose work, that is, the concern with being, this study seeks to answer the question: How can an interpreter apply an existential-ontological approach to the interpretation of a work of modern American prose fiction?

To answer this question the present writer first examines the relationship between the existential-ontological approach and contemporary interpretation theory and between that approach and prose literature and then presents an analysis of Saul Bellow's Henderson The Rain King to demonstrate how this modern American novel can be interpreted existentially from the perspective of the interpreter's ontological concern in the work. For the purposes of this study the particular existential-ontological viewpoint of Martin Heidegger will serve as the originating point for the discussion (of the relationship between the existential-ontological viewpoint and interpretation theory) and for the analysis of the Bellow novel. In an application of Heidegger's point of view to interpretation, the work of literature is an act, not a thing, and the interpreter a participant-observer intent on discovering how the work reveals itself through his own being and becoming.

#### The Background of the Subject-Object Dichotomy in Western Thought

The tendency of reader-critics in interpretation to think in terms of the separation of form and content is an attitude based in the subject-object dichotomy characterizing Western thought since the Renaissance. The split between subject and object in Western thought emerged with the development of scientific rationalism in the late years

of the seventeenth century. In their effort to establish the autonomy of human science, Decartes and, later, the British empiricists Locke and Hume are traditionally credited with formulating the dichotomy: the tendency to split man into a thinking substance outside nature and a bodily substance subject to nature. The dichotomy was also extant, however, in medieval Christian doctrine which viewed man as being composed of two substances: a mortal body and an immortal soul, the two regarded as inseparable until death. Since man's soul was an innate part of his world during his life span, according to the credo of Christian thought, man could experience his world directly. Decartes and his followers broke from Christian doctrine on the point of the identification of man's soul with physical nature. To permit the body to be subject to the principles of scientific rationalism the soul, they believed, must be completely independent from the external world. The Cartesian consciousness, as Straus describes it, is "a worldless, bodyless, incorporeal, thinking substance."<sup>6</sup> Consciousness is outside the world, in other words, and, man, therefore, as thinking being is also outside the world:

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6. Erwin W. Straus, "Aesthesiology and Hallucinations," trans. Erwin W. Straus and Bayard Morgan, in Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology, ed. Rollo May (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1958), p. 141.

The Cartesian ego, looking at the outside world, is in no contact, has no direct communication, with any alter ego. According to Decartes, self-awareness precedes the awareness of the world. We are aware of ourselves without necessarily being aware of anything else. In consciousness, each one is alone with himself. More correctly, one should say: Consciousness is alone with itself; for the Cartesian Ego is not identical with the man Decartes; it is "mind, soul, intellect."<sup>7</sup>

In contemporary terms, our often casual reference to "the world" as though it were something external to ourselves is an example of an expression rooted in the Cartesian notion that direct contact with reality is impossible. Since the world is outside of the realm of our consciousness, we tend, in our adherence to the Cartesian attitude, to distrust sensory experience; knowledge received through the senses is often felt to be an inferior and unreliable type of knowledge. Though Decartes did not deny the existence of an external world, he held that at best that existence was only probable. The external world was, rather, something to be proved by means of the human intellect. Reality, in Decartes' perspective, is a function of judgment (i.e., of induction, deduction, or projection), and the human intellect by some mysterious process transforms sensory data and that data, in turn, into qualitative categories existing not in things themselves but only in our minds.

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7. Straus, "Aesthesiology," p. 142.

Modern thought assumes the direct experience of reality. Sensory data are understood in terms of the relation of the self (as an experiencing being) to the outer world, to things which are actually outside of the self and not merely projected outward or inferred by a worldless or extramundane consciousness. Thus, we regard the qualities of visible things such as "this green plant" or "that brown chair" to be qualities inherent in the objects themselves rather than simply data within the mind. The difference between the Cartesian view of reality and the modern conception of reality is described by Straus as the difference, respectively, between the two formulas: "Something happens in the outside world in accordance with the laws of nature" and "Something happens to me in the world."<sup>8</sup> As Straus further points out, the existence of the object itself has never been fully accounted for in any theory of projection such as that of Decartes which adheres to the subjectivity of the senses:

Decartes and his followers could not accept the prescientific formulation of reality, because consciousness substituted for the experiencing creature, had been turned into a neutral receiver of impressions, a remote observer of events. In other words, the prelogical sphere of the immediate experience of reality had been eliminated . . . .<sup>9</sup>

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8. Straus, "Aesthesiology," p. 142.

9. Straus, "Aesthesiology," p. 142.

Though in modern experience our everyday conception of reality is contrary to that of Cartesian theory, in Western thought one still finds a somewhat ubiquitous compliance to the same subject-object orientation. The adherence to the subject-object separation in modern thought arises from the use of the dichotomy in scientific theory and the tendency of the modern world to want to be "scientific." As May comments:

Ever since Decartes separated understanding from will, science has proceeded on the basis of this dichotomy, and we tried to assume that "facts" about human beings could be separated from their "freedom," cognition could be separated from conation.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, by no means accidentally does contemporary man feel estranged from nature, nor does the consciousness of each individual human being seem to stand by itself, alone. The alienation of modern man from the natural and human world has been built into our Western thought, education, and, to an extent, even into our language. To rediscover man as being interrelated with his world and to rediscover world as meaningful to man is, therefore, an effort requiring a more fundamental approach than other viewpoints offering merely a rearrangement of some of our contemporary ideas.

Modern adherence to the Cartesian perspective is particularly evident in much of the theory and language of

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10. Rollo May, Love and Will (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1969), p. 199.



contemporary literary criticism. The reaction of New Criticism against the poetics of Romanticism led to a general tendency to emphasize the poem as aesthetic object and the reader as subjective respondent. In practice critical departure from Wordsworth's concept of poetry as the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings taking its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility<sup>11</sup>--the, perhaps, best known statement of Romantic orthodoxy--led to the emergence of a new vocabulary of critical terms employed to separate components of a literary work in order to understand how it is put together and how it functions as a source of knowledge. I. A. Richards' efforts to describe poetic metaphor in terms of its "tenor" and "vehicle" and Ransom's efforts to resolve the paradox of "texture" and "structure" are instances of critics' tendency to adhere to the separability of the logical from the emotional content of the poem in actual critical practice. Critical theory, however, tends to deny this separability. A commonplace in contemporary aesthetics and theories of literary criticism is that the full complexity of the internal relations within a poem are untranslatable in part as well as in terms of the whole. Susanne K.

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11. William Wordsworth, "Preface to the Second Edition of Lyrical Ballads," in Critical Theory Since Plato, ed. Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), p. 411.

Langer, describing a work of art as a single expressive form, articulates this idea:

It [a work of art] may, indeed, be analyzed, in that its articulation may be traced and various elements in it distinguished; but it can never be constructed by a process of synthesis of elements, because no such elements exist outside it. They occur in total form; as the convex and concave surfaces of a shell may be noted as characterizing its form, but a shell cannot be synthetically composed of "the concave" and "the convex." There are no such factors before there is a shell.<sup>12</sup>

This study takes the position that to deny the separation of form and content while at the same time to adhere to it in critical practice is a dilemma in literary criticism that can be reduced by viewing a literary work from an existential-ontological, rather than from a subject-object perspective. In the particular existential-ontological viewpoint of Heidegger, the literary work is an act, not a thing, and the interpreter a participant-observer intent on discovering how the work reveals itself through his own being and becoming. The discussion to follow illustrates some of the basic tenets of Heidegger's existential-ontological point of view.

#### An Illustration of the Ontological Perspective

If one conceives Eliot's first line from "Gerontion," "Here I am, an old man in a dry month," to be a balanced conjunction or "complete fusion" of form and

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12. Susanne K. Langer, Feeling and Form (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 369.

content (i.e., subject and object, tenor and vehicle, or texture and structure) one is essentially saying that there is a definite split between man and his world. To assume that man projects his feelings onto nature implies that he can have feelings apart from his world--that he can be aware of himself before he is aware of his world. This assumption leads to the paradoxical idea that consciousness devoid of content can be aware of itself by being aware of nothing. Such a formula leaves us with a thought without a thinker, humanity without an existing individual, or a crowd without a singular "person." Humanity, in such a Cartesian viewpoint, is an abstraction. The objectivity of such a system of thought loses the existing subject.

Whereas our perception of Eliot's line as perfect or complete may be appropriate, our perception of the line as a "fusion"--implying two initially separate things--is not. Man is not a being apart from the world. Man is a being-in-the-world and form and content, subject and object in Eliot's line are complete because they were never otherwise, never two separate things. If Eliot's line, "Here I am, an old man in a dry month," were a product of a pre-conceived statement from the poet, "I feel old and lifeless and will find that which expresses my feeling," then the poem could be regarded as separable from the man Eliot. The poem, in this perspective, would be merely experiential

decoration, an illustration or visual and verbal sign for an abstract idea.

Conceived as a unique, untranslatable "recreation of thought into feeling," Eliot's poem is a "unit of unities," a symbol. To regard the poem as a symbol is not only more appropriate but considerably different from the idea of it regarded as a sign. As symbol there is no subject-object dichotomy between the form and the content (our sense of the embodied idea and emotion) and the image which is that "felt-life." To regard the poem as symbol is to say the poem is an external counterpart of a particular "psychic model" that is internal to the aesthetic reader. As Garvin describes this psychic model, it "reflects the organization of the object which symbolizes it (the denotation or feeling), the total aesthetic process consisting in the construction in the percipient of feelings the form of which he finds symbolized in the aesthetic object."<sup>13</sup> The encounter between reader and poem is simultaneously an engagement in the feeling the poem (symbol) articulates. Our response to the poem is, as Langer says, to "the feeling of it." This "feeling is not communicated but revealed; the created form 'has' it, so that perception of the virtual object . . . is at once the

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13. Lucius Garvin, "Emotivism, Expression and Symbolic Meaning," Journal of Philosophy, LV (January 20, 1958), p. 117.

perception of its amazingly integrated and intense feeling."<sup>14</sup> Existing simultaneously, symbol and feeling cannot be contemplated apart from one another. The man Eliot, therefore, thinks in symbols since apart from the symbol (poem) the embodied emotion is only an undefined or inexpressible feeling. As the feeling in the poet becomes conscious enough to be expressed as an emotion it is at once embodied in the symbol. As a living symbol, a poem cannot be translated into any other identical terms. "Gerontion," therefore, is a symbolic referent for some unknowable thing which one may sense exists but which one can have no clearer representation for than the experience of the poem itself. As symbol, the poem implies something inexpressible by rational means; it attempts to express something for which no verbal context exists.

To discuss a poem such as "Gerontion" in terms of form and content as though some objective or logical material of the poem could be separated from some subjective or emotional content is irrelevant to an individual reader's experience of the poem. The "all" of the poem--its truth or life or knowledge--exists in the relationship between the poet and his world and, in turn, in the relationship between the reader and his world, not apart from it. The fact that man sees in his world a reflection of his own

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14. Langer, Feeling and Form, p. 394.

concerns is not false or irrelevant unless one separates man's consciousness from man as person, as a being-in-the-world. As one interpreter of Heidegger's concept of Being-in-the-world (of Dasein) comments in relation to this point:

Being-in-the-world cannot be thought of as a thinking substance, nor can the world be considered an extended substance as Decartes assumed, for either notion portrays the world as a type of "container" with man inside. Such a view is phenomenologically false and irrelevant because it pictures man and the world as objectively separate entities, whereas the world existentially (or ontologically) understood is a sphere of human concern, and "man" and "the world" must be understood as hyphenated concepts.<sup>15</sup>

Without man there could be no world. Man and his world are one all encompassing unit. Being, that is, to exist--to be alive--is to be in a process or state of being-in-the-world. The relationship of a man (reader or poet) and his world is actually an expression of his own being, since the nature of things outside him is a mirror image of where he is with respect to the realization of his total being. Thus it is more meaningful to speak of the first line of "Gerontion" not as an inexplicable, or mystical fusion of form and content (of subject and object or whatever terms may be employed to identify the materials of the poem) but, rather, as the expression of an ontological crisis, the resolution of which concerns the persona of the poem and

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15. William S. Sahakian, History of Philosophy (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1968), p. 350.

the reader equally. The way the world looks to man is the way man is. This is to say, in Heidegger's terms, the fact that Dasein (being-in-the-world) is man's personal existence is the fact that makes objective truth, for him, always uncertain and paradoxical.

Truth (for the existing individual) is subjectivity, and the subjective truth is inwardness. Truth is not merely a statement of fact, an idea which corresponds to its object, or something which we possess; rather truth is that on which the individual acts, a way of existence; he exists it and lives it. The individual is truth.<sup>16</sup>

The necessity of self commitment is fundamental to the existential approach to human life. Kierkegaard emphasizes the idea that truth is equivalent to reality only as the individual produces it in action, which includes producing it in his own consciousness, and the idea similarly appears in strong form in Sartre's contention, you are your choices. Thus, for both the speaker of "Gerontion" and for the reader, subjectivity is truth and it is also reality. Insofar as both the reader and the speaker are existent beings-in-the-world, their respective consciousnesses cannot be abstracted from their respective existences since, as a phenomenon, existence cannot be thought, it must be lived.

To regard "Gerontion" as the expression of an ontological crisis is to acknowledge the fact that at one time or another, for one reason for another, the reader's

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16. Sahakian, History of Philosophy, p. 348.

existence in the world as well as that of the speaker of the poem either did, has, or will cease to be. The thought of suicide, as Nietzsche once remarked, has saved many lives. Similarly, it is the dread of the loss of vitality which makes one wish to "seize the day" and make of each hour something of value. The fact of inevitable death compels both the self of the reader and the self of the persona in "Gerontion" to take existence seriously. The taking of existence seriously is the essence of the ontological-existential approach to both literature and life. Heidegger's treatment of this point is postulated in his concept of Dasein's facticity. William S. Sahakian describes the idea and implications of facticity as "the factuality of the fact of one's own Dasein, the fact that Dasein understands its own Being, i.e., is self-conscious."

An implication of facticity is "that an entity 'within-the-world' has Being-in-the-world in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up in its 'destiny' with the Being of those entities which it encounters within its own world." The human being is caught in the situation of facticity, for he exists and has to be. He is flung into the world, and finds himself a fact within it, and subject to a concomitant mood of fear or dread.<sup>17</sup>

To regard "Gerontion" as the expression of an ontological crisis which concerns both the self of the reader and the self of the persona is, therefore, not the same as to say that the poem is about either the fear of death or a loss

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17. Sahakian, History of Philosophy, pp. 350-351.



of vitality--both of which the reader may or may not have experienced. Rather, "Gerontion" confronts the reader as an expression of his own particular feeling of lifelessness or apprehension of death, both of which the reader may or may not have experienced. In other words, "Gerontion" meets the reader as an expression of his own unique feeling of lifelessness in whatever aspect of his experience it happens to appear. As reader--an individual-being-in-the world--he must come to terms with the fact that the loss of vitality has occurred and that the reality of his own "being" is, thereby, changed and limited.

To extend and synopsise the ontological perspective one may consider the application of Heidegger's viewpoint to another form of art. One might, for example, take Picasso's "Guernica" as a sign for the natural objects which the painting attempts to imitate, rather than as a symbolic form capable of affecting one in its own right. To regard "Guernica" as merely a sign, one would, in a sense, never know the existent but otherwise unknowable thing or situation for which the painting is the only referent. "My" participation in "Guernica" is necessary if the painting is to speak to me as it were. Furthermore, if I stand totally outside of the painting I cannot even really see it. Only by looking at Picasso's fragmented bulls and torn villagers as patterns of forms which speak to me through my own body and my feelings and perceptions

of "my" world can I truly see the painting. Ultimately, the world that I must empathize with and give myself to in terms of a veritable universe of basic forms in which my life is grounded is the world of the self--"my world." So, too, a reader may deprive a literary work of the immediacy of its effect by equating it with some known ideas, or feelings or modes of behavior. A literary work should, in an ontological view, remain a sensory experience; a novel or poem should not be reduced to a concept. The concept, abstractly, may be true, but as an objective theory it is not real, since it is abstracted from reality--separated from existence.

. . . In sensory experiencing all depends upon me, everything approaches me, I myself am affected, my existence is at stake. The formula for knowing is "something happens in the world" (in accordance with the laws of nature); the formula for sensory experiencing is "something happens to me in the world." The reality of knowing is subjected to tests which decide whether an event obeys the general laws of nature; sensory reality knows no test and no proofs; it is enough that I feel myself affected.<sup>18</sup>

Since a literary work refers to no known thing or situation per se, the reader encounters it as an expression of his particular being-in-the-world. To regard a literary work symbolically, in other words, is to approach it existentially by seeing it as the expression of one's own particular ontological concern.

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18. Straus, "Aesthesiology," pp. 145-146.

The existential-ontological viewpoint has long been an inherent part of Eastern aesthetics, of Eastern philosophy and religion. Since Eastern thought never suffered the radical split between subject and object that has characterized Western thought, the concern with ontology, with the study of being, as a way of relating to reality has always been assumed in Oriental countries. The ontological attitude consequently is an inherent characteristic of the languages of the East.

. . . in Eastern languages, such as Japanese, adjectives always include the implication of "for-me-ness." That is to say, "this flower is beautiful" means "for me this flower is beautiful." Our Western dichotomy between subject and object has led us, in contrast, to assume that we have said most if we state that the flower is beautiful entirely divorced from ourselves, as though a statement were the more true in proportion to how little we ourselves have to do with it.<sup>19</sup>

The present, widespread interest in Oriental thought in the Western world may suggest a fundamental need to get beyond the circle of dichotomies which reflect our sense of estrangement and cultural crisis in life and in our literature.

Adopting the existential-ontological approach does not mean that a particular philosophy is to be imposed on a work of literature. To comprehend the reality of a particular literary work, the existential-ontological approach

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19. May, Existence, p. 63.

- seeks to establish the relationship of the work, its persona, and its reader to the common ground of being and in the larger perspective to undercut whatever estranges us from ourselves and from our world. Since the ontological reader sees method as organic, he conceives of it as individual, as existing in a unique sense rather than as a part of a particular method of literature. The ontological perspective rejects not meaning but rather rational conclusion as the sum of total meaning in a given work. Meaning is not only present, it is magnified and complicated. The existential-ontological view is an attitude requiring the reader's immediate, moment-to-moment perception and participation. In rejecting formulas that predetermine perceptual response, the ontological concern places upon the reader an obligation almost completely absent in most traditional forms of criticism. It maintains, moreover, that individual human experience is meaningful in all the ways in which perception is possible. In this perspective, such elusive concepts as D. H. Lawrence's "truth of the bowels" are no longer irreconcilable with rationality but stand parallel to it. Literature, one way or another, is tied to life in a total sense. The correlation, in this study, between disintegrating values in contemporary life and experimental form is based on both a need for looking in new places and a need for finding new things. Man's complex involvement in his world necessitates an involved

approach to his literature. The literary work, in this viewpoint, becomes an act and the reader becomes a participant-observer trying to discover how the work reveals itself through his own being and becoming. The discussion in Chapter II is focused upon the relationship of the existential-ontological perspective in respect to both contemporary interpretation theory and to contemporary prose literature.

## CHAPTER II

### SURVEY OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF ONTOLOGY AND INTERPRETATION THEORY, CONTEMPORARY PROSE LITERATURE, AND BELLOW CRITICISM

#### The Relationship of Ontology and Contemporary Oral Interpretation Theory

The existential-ontological approach to literature is particularly well-suited to the study of literature called interpretation. A performing art, interpretation, as noted in the preceding chapter, is said to be a "somantic thinking"--a thinking, intuiting, and feeling about literature with the body. Roloff describes it as "a profound engagement with a vulnerable self."<sup>1</sup> As opposed to silent reading which advances the subject-object dichotomy, that is, the illusion of the separation of mind and body, intellect and emotion, reflective thought and generative behavior, oral interpretation is "an act of being nakedly human, publicly; it is a presentational act of literature."<sup>2</sup> In an interpretative act (or action) thinking about and revealing literature are one and cannot be two separate acts. The body makes the mind, as in

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1. Roloff, The Perception and Evocation of Literature, p. 3.

2. Roloff, p. 3.

Donne's theory of poetics. Like an interpretative act an existential-ontological attitude toward literature originates within the participating self of the reader as a unique being-in-the-world. As such, the ontological approach is rooted in the fact that the physiological and psychological processes of the "self" of the reader are inseparably bound within any act of his understanding. Man thinking is a "self" thinking with all of one's body. The existential-ontological approach to literature, demanding as it does active participation on the part of the reader, promises to make relevant what otherwise might remain remote in the experience the literary work embodies. In other words, it is an approach to literature founded in a doing that rests on a basis of knowing rather than on knowing about, an approach closely attuned to the interpretative art.

Interpretation . . . enters the service of literature. Because interpretation demands involvement and identification with an experience symbolized in language, it is both an enlivening and broadening discipline. The interpreter does not deal only with facts about literature; he focuses upon the literary object itself. In a very real sense, as<sub>3</sub> he embodies the literature, he gains knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

As writers in psychology and sociology often reiterate, the awareness of one's own being occurs basically

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3. Alethea Smith Mattingly and Wilma H. Grimes, Interpretation: Writer Reader Audience, 2nd ed., revised (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1970), p. 5.

on the level of the grasping of one's self (an experience of Dasien in Heidegger's terms). Such an awareness of self cannot be explained essentially in social categories. Rather, if we wish to or can grasp it, an awareness of self becomes our own private possession, an innate quality of our own sense of self as being-in-the-world. The existential-ontological approach is, thus, a creative disposition toward literature. It emphasizes the fact that the effect of literary art is a "resonance," to use Burnshaw's term, "an empathetic echo and compelling center of interest within the reader himself."<sup>4</sup> Such a resonance does not finally result from the reader's knowledge about the collective mind of criticism, nor from his adherence to a particular literary method in his experience of a work. Rather, resonance comes from a reader's perception of "self" in terms of how that self is affected in the process of engagement with whatever experience the literature evokes in him. A literary work is something which is done to the reader. The experience of a literary work, as Burnshaw suggests, "begins with the body and ends with the body; it begins in one and it ends in another."<sup>5</sup> Significantly, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche were able to take the body seriously, in contrast to the majority of thinkers of

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4. Stanley Burnshaw, The Seamless Web (New York: G. Braziller, 1970), p. 121.

5. Burnshaw, The Seamless Web, p. 203.



the nineteenth century oriented to the subject-object dichotomy. According to May, the reason for this was that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche were able to view the body as one mode of the reality of a person rather than as a collection of abstracted substances or drives. "Thus," as May notes, "when Nietzsche says 'We think with our bodies,' he means something radically different from the behaviorists."<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, the thought and the emotion--a closely interwoven attitude or complex of attitudes--in the reader and in the narrator of a literary work are inseparable in the interpretative act. The ontological attitude, by forcing a reader to discover new levels of creative disposition and to evolve new willingnesses that function within the self, focuses this mutuality. By attempting to integrate the wholeness of "time," "being," and "world," the ontological viewpoint urges a trust in the simultaneity of the multiple perceptions of what a "self," in a state of being, senses, feels, knows, intuitively, or wills. Such a viewpoint is sensibly oriented and as such demands from the reader a firm confidence in the sensorium of experience. As both Burnshaw and Roloff suggest, we have long been conditioned to distrust such intuitive inclinations. And, yet, as they have noted, to truly know a literary work we must participate in it, and to participate fully we must trust

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6. May, Existence, p. 40.

in the intuition of the self--in the self-consciousness and in the particular experiential disposition of the perceiver of the work. Thus, whereas the existential-ontological approach does require from the reader an appreciation of form and content in a literary work, it first requires a reader to sense, to observe, to participate in the totality of the work before knowing fully how that work was put together. As May notes, decision precedes knowledge in adherence to the ontological attitude.<sup>7</sup> The core intent of the ontological approach is what happens in the self of the reader and in the self of the persona in relation to their common ground of being existent in the world and in relation to their common state of perpetually becoming in the world.

The traditional subject-object attitude toward literature has been perpetuated by our print culture. Literary works have been produced primarily for print for over four hundred years. We often tend, as a result, to think of a novel as an "art object," frequently perceived to be a static entity existing in substantive and literal form in the print of a series of pages of a book. Regarded as literature, however, a novel is never a static or fixed object. Rather, it is protean, unstable, subject to shifts in the currents and sensibilities of people or of an era.

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7. May, Existence, p. 145.

The diction, shape, form, and style of a novel are continually evolving and being transformed. A novel is itself always in an active state of becoming. Thus, a novel is more appropriately regarded not as an "art object" but as an "art working." According to Roloff, literature for the reader is always "art in process . . . . It can never be fixed or finished in our minds because it is always in the process of becoming . . . it can only be disclosed in time."<sup>8</sup> To regard a novel from a subject-object viewpoint, therefore, is a false perspective because regarded as "an object" a novel is only an analogy. Wimsatt, commenting on the fallacy of adhering to a subject-object perspective in the reading of a poem, says: "If anything about poetry is clear at all it is that a poem is not really a thing, like a horse or a house, but only analogically so."<sup>9</sup> The novel, like the poem, is seldom merely a literal non-verbal object, rather it is life released in language or language performed by life. The life of a literary work is not separable from the life of the percipient, insofar as one accepts a universal ground of being that existentially unites all things.

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8. Roloff, The Perception and Evocation of Literature, p. 17.

9. W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., The Verbal Icon (New York: Noonday Press, 1965), p. 50.

The likeness between theories of oral interpretation and the existential-ontological approach to literature goes deeper than the chance similarity of words used by the two viewpoints. Brooks, for instance, says that our reading of a literary work is, as in the author's writing of it, a "process of exploration"--a phrase recollective of Coleridge's description of the reader's experience of the poem as a "joyful excursion." Both writers imply the existence of a feeling and knowing self in the process of experiencing--the process of becoming in the ontological perspective. Krieger, adhering closely to the idea that the poetic process does not permit a pre-existent or translatable counterpart, warns, nevertheless, against critical theories "that keep us inside the work without reference to existence or illumination of the ordinary world."<sup>10</sup> Presenting a case for a dramatistic approach to poetics, Geiger reminds the reader that to discuss technique is to discuss, ultimately, the self of the original artist, since technique is a process of the poet's own self-discovery and exploration: "Dramatic theory depends on understanding the poet's [art] to be a speculative probe of experience, in which the poem in process is an

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10. Murray Krieger, The Tragic Vision (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 233.

investigative resource for his developing telos or plan."<sup>11</sup>  
 Geiger also acknowledges the need for a broader spectrum in viewing a literary work than that offered within a subject-object perspective when he says:

I point toward a pleasing time when to ask whether the poem is object or utterance will be an unreal question, when our reference to the poem as a dramatized verbal utterance or as a dramatic verbal object will express the same analytical regard.<sup>12</sup>

The ontological perspective provides a deep dimension for perceiving and dealing with the chasm between what is abstractly "true" and what is existentially "real" for the "living" reader as well as for the persona of a literary work. The ontological perspective corresponds in this regard to contemporary theories of oral interpretation that assume the first responsibility of the interpreter to be the expression of the attitude of the speaker within the literary work. To know as fully as possible the self of the speaker of a literary work is to have a grasp of his attitude, of the complex of his thought and emotional processes as a being-in-the-world.

The writer of the present study admits that the high degree of self-conscious involvement required by the

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11. Don Geiger, The Dramatic Impulse in Modern Poetics (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), pp. 17-18.

12. Geiger, The Dramatic Impulse in Modern Poetics, p. 9.

ontological approach involving self-discovery on the part of the reader--causing him to "live" the work--is subject to most of the arguments expressed against Romantic criticism. In contemporary interpretation theory a direct connection with Romanticism can be seen. Renewed attention to the speaker of the literary work and to the unity of mind and body in the act of performance indicates an adherence to Romanticism as progenitor of theories of form and feeling in the aesthetics of interpretation. Yet Romanticism is no longer a contrary or unrelated viewpoint. Not unlike Romantic criticism, contemporary oral interpretation theory is intent on restoring confidence in the sensorium of the reader's experience of a literary work.

How the student achieves his leap of understanding from his knowledge of literary perceptions to the performing evocations is, ultimately, his own "mystery." Life given poetic utterance places the perceiver and evocator of literature on the edge of the mysterium tremendum, and he will return to the daily affairs of life in a body and being transformed.<sup>13</sup>

When speaking of performance theory in oral interpretation, one is usually speaking from an ontological point of view. Contemporary interpretation theory, in other words, acknowledges the "seamless web" of the implicative reaches of literature and the fusion of psychological and physiological reaches in the being of the reader himself. Roloff

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13. Roloff, The Perception and Evocation of Literature, pp. 4-5.

illustrates this ontological disposition in contemporary performance theory when he says:

The performer of literature attempts to reveal the "workings" of a literary experience . . . . In the effective performance of literature, there is a sense of something being revealed; . . . the perceiver senses an art form working upon and within him. What he sees and hears happening before him is both the literature and the performer attaining a state of being.<sup>14</sup>

#### The Relationship of Ontology and Contemporary Prose Literature

According to Eisinger, the crisis in the human condition and culture of the twentieth century is, in its largest dimension, an existential crisis. The search for self-discovery and for an affirmation of reality runs through the literary and philosophical thought of the period, revealing an intense preoccupation of writers in both areas with the problems of the self--the struggle to define and shape a relationship between self and world. In Heidegger's viewpoint the greatest calamity of Western Man is his "oblivion of Being" which culminates in the will to will, a consequence of the nihilistic trend of occidental metaphysics with its dichotomy of subject-object, its ruthless exploitation of nature, and its forgetfulness of being over the concern with being things. Similarly a striking feature of contemporary American prose fiction is

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14. Roloff, The Perception and Evocation of Literature, p. 17.

that often the central moments in the experience of literary characters are, as it were, moments of Existenz in which man, transcending the immediate pressures of his external environment and the limiting conditions of his particular social matrix, asks himself some fundamental question about the nature of his own humanity. As Scott suggests, a definite line of this sort runs through contemporary American prose literature "whose principal area of inquiry is the phenomenology of selfhood."<sup>15</sup>

Heidegger's impression of the encounter of self and world sets the stage for an interpretation of modern man's dilemma as little dependent on either nihilism or on supernatural consolation. The novel, within Heidegger's perspective, is an ideal form for mirroring and confirming the confrontation of self and world. Not only does the contemporary novel represent a kind of revolt in favor of order, but, also, the growth of the novel corresponds, historically, to the beginnings of the modern metaphysical revolt.<sup>16</sup> By selecting and rearranging elements from reality and composing them into an imaginative pattern, the author gives them a meaningfulness and order they would otherwise not have. As an imaginative recreation of

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15. Nathan A. Scott, Jr., Craters of the Spirit: Studies in the Modern Novel (Washington, D. C.: Corpus Books, Inc., 1968), p. 237.

16. May, Existence, p. 83.



experience, the novel can, therefore, in and of itself become a revolt against a world appearing to have no logical pattern.

One may argue that the philosophical work and the novel are wholly distinct forms. Both, however, are to a degree concerned with ordering experience. Camus, conceiving the ultimate function of the novel, saw it as a form harmonizing certain metaphysical aspects of philosophy with the imaginative structuring of experience--a traditional characteristic of the novel. "It is true," Camus says, "that each activity possesses its own particular climate, but this type of statement merely emphasizes the obvious fact that art is not philosophy and philosophy is not art. Clearly, they do not coincide, but there can exist an interpenetration between them and both embody . . . a common disquiet and similar anxieties."<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, the interpenetration of ideas between philosophy and art renders Heidegger's existential-ontological concepts pertinent to the study of contemporary prose literature.

The ontological viewpoint, then, is closely aligned not only to contemporary oral interpretation theory as indicated earlier in this chapter, but also is germane to the discussion of American prose literature of

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17. John Cruickshank, Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt (New York: Galaxy Books, 1960), p. 146.

the modern transitional age; for the past three-quarters of the century, American prose literature has been largely concerned with the ontological crisis of the individual who must continually face the fact of his existence occurring (being and becoming) in a time of cultural change and profound moral and spiritual upheaval.<sup>18</sup> Caught in the convulsions of a transitional age, individuals are finding that the accepted mores and ways of thought no longer yield security. Having to be existent in such an era, the individual has a choice of either adhering to conformism or dogmatism (in a state of unawareness and dependence) or he may strive (or be forced) to enter into a heightened self-consciousness enabling him to become aware of his existence in terms of new foundations and with new convictions. Thus, an important affinity between the ontological attitude and the contemporary American novel resides in the fact that both disciplines are concerned and must deal with individuals in crisis. The narrator of the contemporary American novel and the individual reader exist in a period of transition, whether real or literary. Both are in a state of becoming, and, therefore, potentially in a state of ontological crisis. This does not mean that the ontological attitude is necessarily despairing. (Socrates, whose dialectical

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18. Scott, Craters of the Spirit, pp. 11-23.

search for truth in the individual is a prototype of the existential-ontological attitude, was optimistic.) Still, in the opinion of the writer of the present study, the approach is particularly appropriate to individuals existing in an age of transition--a time of radical cultural change that compels an individual either to remain lost or to achieve a new self-consciousness. As in psychoanalysis, ontologically-oriented literary study seeks to utilize the very conflicts in the contemporary personality of the reader and literary persona as avenues to a clearer or deeper understanding of the "self" of each as they "meet" in the common ground of being.

The primary objective of the ontological approach to interpretation of contemporary American prose fiction is to understand the persona of the novel as being. This is not to deny the validity of structural elements (of form, diction, and so on) or patterns of meaning (content or expressed ideas). The approach holds, however, to the idea that such elements or dynamisms can be understood only in the context of the "existence" of the person (as persona or reader) with whom one is dealing. The distinctive core and character of the ontological approach is its focus on the experience of immediate (in terms of quality not actual time) encounter with another person--the narrator of the work. Regarded in such a perspective, the narrator as human being comes alive to us on a very

different level from what we know about him. One may, for instance, know a good deal about Quentin Compson, Faulkner's narrator in The Sound and the Fury, from having considered his appearances, actions, and reactions to other character-narrators in the novel. One may be equally familiar with several external facts: the criticism and judgments of other readers concerning Quentin's position, for example, in the tradition of American prose literature. When one first "meets" Quentin, however, one may have a sudden awareness of "here-is-a-new-person," a unique human being in the sense that heretofore he has been unknown. The point is not that it is of no use to learn such information but, rather, that the grasping of the being of Faulkner's narrator occurs on a different level from that of our knowledge of things about him. Such knowledge is reduced to a different dimension when we face the most real, encompassing fact of Quentin as an immediate, "living" person. In this confrontation all of our prior knowledge about him forms itself into a new pattern. This is not to imply that the prior knowledge about him was in any way wrong-minded but, rather, that that knowledge takes its meaning and significance from the reality of Quentin as a being of whom these specifics--pieces of knowledge about him--are expressions.

The importance of studying all of the possible objective data about a novel is in no way rejected.

Rather, the point is that in the realm of actual experience, knowledge about a novel (whether intrinsically or extrinsically identified) attains a different configuration in relation to the first-hand encounter of the self-of-the-reader and the self-of-the-narrator. Everyday life experience provides evidence of this phenomenon. One may, for example, know of the intellectual or aesthetic achievements of a person, be intent on learning from him, and yet in an actual encounter be unable to respond regardless of how important or helpful a response may be at the time of the meeting. No matter how cognitively or intellectually focused one may be, if the feeling for and toward the other person is absent, prior factual knowledge about him is ineffectual. According to May, this phenomenon is the "classic distinction between knowing and knowing about."<sup>19</sup> When we seek to know a person, in other words, the knowledge about him must be subordinated to the larger fact of his actual existence. To assume an existential-ontological attitude toward a novel is to ask whether one is seeing the narrator as he really is, knowing him in his own reality, or whether one is merely seeing a projection of one's own accumulated theories about him. In short, the ontological approach asks: how can one know Quentin in his real world, the world in which he "lives," moves, has his

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19. May, Existence, p. 38.

being, and which is for him unique, concrete, and different from one's own theories about his era, culture or world? One has not known or participated in his world directly and, yet, one must know it and to some extent be able to exist in it to have any chance of really knowing Faulkner's narrator.

Though it would be an oversimplification to generalize the nature of contemporary American prose literature, in the writing of some contemporary critics of that literature one finds a certain inclination toward viewing a work in terms of its own being. In Against Interpretation Susan Sontag characterizes the refusal of the new sensibility of artists to deplete the world as a desire to set up a shadow world of meanings. What we need today, Sontag declares, is not a hermeneutics but an "erotics of art."<sup>20</sup> Literature, according to such a viewpoint, is undergoing a transformation in function, undertaking to be a new kind of instrument for modifying consciousness. What is new is the renewed intensity with which the artist in literature conceives the essential medium of his art to be a sensory medium. As Sontag notes, "what he [the literary artist] wants to provoke is a more intense act of seeing, or hearing or feeling: it is the

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20. Susan Sontag, Against Interpretation (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1966), p. 14.

luminousness of the thing in itself."<sup>21</sup> The surfaces of literature, according to Sontag, are so unified and clean and have such direct address and rapid momentum that they can be just what they are, namely, adventures in sensation. From such an angle of vision, novels of contemporary sensibility want not to impose or propose any criticism of life in the Arnoldian sense but, rather, to give rise to something like an excitation, a phenomenon of commitment, judgment in a state of thralldom or captivation. According to such critical viewpoints experience of the form or style of knowing something, rather than knowing about something like a fact or moral judgment, in itself is what the contemporary author is aiming at. Rather than making statements or attempting to render reality the contemporary novelist tries to challenge and expand the sensorium of his reader. The principal interest of the contemporary novelist is no longer in the edification of the reader or in the conceptual content of the novelist's own production. Rather, the primary purpose of the contemporary novelist is to create a work of literary art having as its effect a confounding and unclosing of the individual reader's senses.

Contemporary literary critics who adhere to concepts of modern literature similar to those of Sontag tend

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21. Sontag, Against Interpretation, p. 13.

to view traditional literary criticism--criticism that regards a work as a statement requiring interpretation--as representing the revenge of the intellect upon the world. Sontag describes the point when she says: "to interpret is to impoverish; it is to turn the given actualities of existence into another world. Our world, the world already given, is depleted and impoverished enough so a plague on all duplicates of it, until we again experience more immediately what we have."<sup>22</sup> The desire to rescue the literary imagination from the tyranny of the empirical or rational idea is a concern common to literary criticism ever since the advent of Romanticism. The effort is not new, as Sontag acknowledges, when she speaks of "the hypertrophy of the intellect at the expense of energy and sensual capability [as the] already classical dilemma of our American culture."<sup>23</sup>

The point here is not to argue the case that an author's thinking is irrelevant to one's perception of his work. Insofar as literature is an art the medium of which is language and the material of which is the stuff of human experience, it cannot be thought of as being contaminated by ideas. Novels do have ideas and that an artist such as Faulkner did think and that the content of his thought

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22. Sontag, Against Interpretation, p. 302.

23. Scott, Craters of the Spirit, p. 20.



deeply informed his distinctive artistic creation in a work such as The Sound and the Fury can hardly be refuted. Still, the question of how one's total response to a novel may be colored by the particular ideas that the novel embodies--especially if they happen to contravene with some disposition or outlook of one's own as a unique being-in-the-world--is one that inevitably figures within the phenomenology of the aesthetic experience. For example, the work of writers such as Lawrence, Eliot, Faulkner, and Bellow is a literature that is infected with the substance of ideas and doctrine; nor are such ideas only "intellectual." Rather, they are dynamic metaphors about the nature of our times, politics, sexuality, and salvation. Furthermore, they are ideas often so contrary to received traditions that if one is to know them at all one must summon up his own "testimony," as it were. As one commentator on the nature of contemporary literature states:

. . . "The Waste Land" and "Harmonium" and The Good Soldier and Doctor Faustus are scaffolded, to be sure, with an enormous intricacy, but they want chiefly not to call attention to the technique by which they were made--important as it may be for us to have the clearest appreciation of this--but rather, to cross-question us into a deeper understanding of some phase of ourselves. They invite not an exercise in

grammar and syntax but a further act of testimony.<sup>24</sup>

The existential-ontological approach to literary study does not imply that literature simply gives one the "feel" of immediate experience or that the literary author does not do any thinking or that his work does not line itself up behind any significant statements. The approach implies, instead, that a deeper and more profound seizure of a work is dependent not only upon one's knowledge of the work but also upon one's capability for knowing the work in terms of its individual being.

The essay comprising Chapter III of this study rests upon a presupposition that the phase of American prose literature represented by Saul Bellow is one distinguished in part by the symbolic form this particular American writer has given the complex motions of quest and exploration of the human spirit in an age of transition: a time in which "the absence of God moves about with the intimacy of a presence." The vision of hazard and of prospect expressed in Henderson The Rain King is one example of the modern spirit, a symbolic referent to how we live and how we ought to live now. The central, literary stream in modern American prose literature cannot be represented by a single author alone. Bellow's work is,

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24. Richard Lehan, "Existentialism in Recent American Fiction: The Demonic Quest," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, I (Summer, 1959), p. 181.

however, in the opinion of the writer of this study, suggestive of what that literary stream entails, since in the Bellow novel one finds a sense of the contemporary human interior as embracing "cliffs of fall . . . sheer, no-man fathomed" and a warning tenor of mind, as with Gerard Manley Hopkins, to "Hold them cheap/ May who ne'er hung there." As will be explained, the Bellow novel, Henderson The Rain King, is well-suited to an existential-ontological analysis. The narrator, Henderson, has a need to be and to approach him as a "person" rather than as a psychological "object" requires an ability in the reader to see how Henderson is in his particular nature rather than how he is bound within it.

Bellow, as other contemporary American novelists, considers the same disquiet, anxieties, and apparent lack of meaning and hope that Heidegger considers in Sein und Zeit (Being and Time). Since Bellow's attitudes and to an extent his conclusions often coincide closely with those of Heidegger, the interpreter might do well to turn to the philosopher to determine the metaphysics of an important movement in his (the reader's) own time of existence as well as in that of a contemporary American prose narrator. Richard Lehan has found the existential-ontological approach to the analysis of Bellow's novels to be a profitable perspective. Lehan sees parallels between existentialism and Bellow's novels not in terms of influences, but, rather,

in terms of "an affinity of mind or spirit."<sup>25</sup> Contemporary Americans, in Lehan's view, are preoccupied with the same problems and themes that fascinate and puzzle the existentially-oriented writer: ". . . all [existentialist writers] are concerned with the meaning of identity in the modern world, the nature of good and evil, the possibility of fulfillment in the contemporary society, the sources of values in a world without God, and the possibility and meaning of action in an ethical vacuum."<sup>26</sup>

John Clayton, also, notes an affinity between Bellow's heroes and the existential-ontological perspective. The Bellow hero, according to Clayton, is a man caught in an existential crisis of being cut off by despair and self-hatred from those "other beings" he loves, and from humanity due to the need to be and to become, i.e., to move beyond human life--to be more than human.<sup>27</sup> Such a hero creates an ideal version of himself, according to Clayton, and then, unable to live in this image goes on to create a "self" and "world"--a version of reality in which he can live. The need of the Bellow hero, as Clayton points out, is to live in the here-and-now, the

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25. Lehan, "Existentialism," pp. 181-182.

26. John Jacob Clayton, Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), p. 183.

27. Clayton, Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man, p. 97.

world that is--to be not someone else's or even his own ideal image but, rather, simply human being.

More important than the construction of ideal selves and worlds is the need for such constructions. Here again Bellow's analysis is close to that of Sartre and Heidegger. Sartre's man, for example, runs from the terror of a world of pure existence, a world not in relation to human constructs but beyond categories; he runs into a safe ego, an en-soi, and refashions the world into his likeness. Bellow's characters do the same. They cannot face the terror of pure being: they cannot face the terror of their own being  
 . . . . .<sup>28</sup>

The experience of dread (Angst) in Heidegger as in Sartre starts the process of running forward to death as the authentic, unsurpassable possibility of human being. The experience of dread in the self reveals "nothingness" as well as possible "freedom." Dread, according to Heidegger, reveals the possibility of authentic existence. The present, in his conception, is the moment and the situation in which man collects himself, chooses his authentic self. One's destiny is where death, guilt, conscience, freedom, and finitude dwell together in a resolution to make "factuality" wholly and radically one's own. Authenticity, therefore, requires self-honesty and courage.<sup>29</sup>

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28. Frederick Patka, Existentialist Thinkers and Thought (New York: The Citadel Press, 1964), pp. 93-110.

29. Patka, Existentialist Thinkers and Thought, p. 108.

In Chapter III the demonstration applying Heidegger's existential-ontological perspective to Bellow's novel Henderson The Rain King does not seek to prove a borrowing or influence nor to suggest the author's conscious exercises on Heidegger's philosophical themes. What a demonstration of the existential-ontological perspective does suggest is a sympathetic response in the novel to the modern environment; it will lead the reader to ask questions of Bellow's contemporary American novel that he might not have asked otherwise.

#### A Survey of Contemporary Bellow Criticism

Although some contemporary critics conceive the Bellow novel to be a spiritual journey, a process or an existential encounter, a number of contemporary critics of Bellow's work give analyses, also, that could be termed external or sentimental. Such writers tend to adhere to the subject-object perspective. To demonstrate how an existential-ontological approach to Bellow's novel Henderson The Rain King produces a different interpretation from that of external approaches, one must give attention to some selected examples of that form of criticism. The purpose of the following discussion is not to refute such methods of analysis as will be surveyed but, rather, to suggest that the various points emphasized in

subject-object-oriented criticism take on an additional dimension of meaning when regarded from an ontological perspective.

Much contemporary critical assessment of Bellow's novels relies on an external or sentimental rather than on an ontological point of view. Few adherents of such criticism give consideration to the ontological concern of the reader of the work. Such approaches fail to ask the most significant and all-encompassing question: "How is the reader involved in this story?" There are critics, for example, who affiliate Bellow's novels with social realism. In so doing, such critics propose that the author's works present essentially a sociological account of various psychobiological bases in areas of American life. In Maxwell Geismar's analysis, for instance, a Bellow novel is regarded as a form of social portrait, an assimilation of the cultural possibilities within stereotypes of modern American society. Geismar states:

. . . we cannot deny the accuracy of this social picture either, in so far as it relates to the assimilating of all immigrant cultures within the stereotypes of modern American society; while it is from the moral burden of a specifically Jewish heritage that Bellow himself has been able to assess the outlines of this society.<sup>30</sup>

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30. Maxwell Geismar, American Moderns: From Rebellion to Conformity (New York: Hill and Wang, 1958), p. 223.

Such an account reduces a Bellow novel to a descriptive statement or social observation that a Scott Fitzgerald, a John O'Hara, or a J. P. Marquand presents in relation to other areas of American life. Bellow's ground and merit, according to Geismar, resides within a literary format, the "school" of social realism.

. . . Bellow put himself where his sympathies had always lain: with the social realism school of Dreiser, of Thomas Wolfe himself, and of such later figures as Ira Wolfert, James T. Farrell, and Nelson Algren. . . . Bellow is indeed, by environment and inclination, another one of these few surviving figures of the 1930's who have not repudiated their heritage and their link with a central literary tradition of the past.<sup>31</sup>

The assessment of a Bellow novel as a form committed to social, moral, and psychobiological issues is not an uncommon critical stance. J. C. Levenson in "Bellow's Dangling Men" writes that, "In his own way, Bellow joins Emerson and Whitman in admonishing us not to change, but to live, and like his predecessors he does not intend us to live meanly."<sup>32</sup> Despite a primarily metaphysical concern, Malcolm Bradbury's criticism also shows how Bellow derives partly from Dreiser and the American naturalist tradition.<sup>33</sup> Adhering to the same stream of critical

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31. Geismar, American Moderns, p. 217.

32. J. C. Levenson, "Bellow's Dangling Men," Critique, III (Summer, 1960), pp. 3-14.

33. Malcolm Bradbury, "Saul Bellow's The Victim," Critical Quarterly, V (Summer, 1963), pp. 127-128.



thought, Marcus Klein, in After Alienation: American Novels Mid-Century, states that the problems faced by all of Bellow's characters "are reducible to a single problem: to meet with a strong sense of self the sacrifice of self demanded by social circumstance."<sup>34</sup> The definition of a Bellow novel in terms of social realism, as described in aspects of the analyses offered by Geismar, Levenson, Bradbury, and Klein, is characteristic of a good portion of the current body of critical discussion of Bellow's work. To center one's reading of a Bellow novel upon such a critical point of view is to regard the persona of the novel as a personification of Bellow's own social concern. Insofar as one sees Bellow as a writer who bases his work on the social-environmental nexus, one is limited to perceiving his work as an anthropological study or picaresque account of the American social depths--which is accurate, informative, aware, but, still inauthentic. Additionally, the critical viewpoint adhering to social realism limits the Bellow novel to a literary survey, a parable of the course of American literary realism during the last three quarters of the century. In essence, such a critical stance causes the reader to know a Bellow persona as an illustration of what is or has been wrong with the

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34. Marcus Klein, "A Discipline of Nobility: Saul Bellow's Fiction," in After Alienation: American Novels in Mid-Century (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1964), pp. 47-51.

contemporary American city (Chicago or New York) or with American society as a whole.

The common denominator in critical interpretations dealing with the social realism theme in Henderson The Rain King is that the persona, Eugene Henderson, is simply a microcosm of a despairing and paralyzed American society. The implication of such a perspective is that Bellow's intent is to deplore the futility of Henderson's life. Viewed from the edge of a bottomless social abyss, Henderson's existence is reduced to being as pointless for him as it is for all others in contemporary American society. What is wrong-minded in such a critical version is not that the Bellow novel is uninfluenced by any dialectical sense of the individual's relation to society. On the contrary, Bellow's novels, as Scott, for one, has noted, "Consistently reveal that the question as to how the individual needs to respond to the requirements levied by social circumstance is one of his [Bellow's] most absorbing preoccupations as a novelist."<sup>35</sup> Strict adherence to the social circumstance view of Henderson's existence does, however, limit the ontological dimension of selfhood in the world of Henderson. Through the social circumstance perspective, the human individual, Henderson, becomes merely an epiphenomenon of social progress. So perceived,

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35. Scott, Craters of the Spirit, p. 236.

Henderson is reduced to a type of personality immersed in a social continuum reaching only toward a social destiny. Henderson, in this point of view, is only a pathetic example of a life-in-death existence. The social realism perspective suggests, in short, that the basic intention of the novel is to reveal the pathos of Henderson's situation. Regarded as a pathetic victim of social circumstance, Henderson is someone to feel sorry for or to identify with sentimentally as a symbolic embodiment of the spiritual or moral paralysis of America. Such a critical perspective limits Henderson to an entity, an object, and makes no allowance for his essence as a being-in-the-world in the state of becoming.

Turning from the social realism perspective, other contemporary critics tend in part to emphasize the ethnological and allegorical elements of Bellow's work. Significant as such elements are within any of Bellow's novels, they also have the subject-object potential to distance the ontological involvement of the reader by adhering to an external or sentimental concept. In Jews and Americans, Irving Malin presents an acutely detailed examination of the Jewish conscience in Bellow's writing. According to Malin, Bellow's novels are fundamentally expressions of Jewish literature and culture, and Bellow's protagonists (including the Gentile, Henderson) are "Jewish ironists," who continually find themselves caught between a

dream-version of reality and factual reality.<sup>36</sup> Writing from a similar perspective, Frederick Hoffman views the persona, Eugene Henderson, as an example of the middle-class "schlemiel" struggling against the loss of identity, trying to survive as best he can in the modern world.<sup>37</sup> According to another account of the ethnological aspects of Bellow's prose fiction, the novelist is not only concerned with the moral values of his heritage, he is even oppressed by them.

Just as Bellow himself has always stressed the narrowest part of the Orthodox Jewish religious tradition--rather than the flowering of secular Jewish culture and art in the New World--so, too, all his heroes continue to be ashamed of and to repudiate their true religious heritage. Judaism in Bellow's work is a source of nostalgia, but also of guilt and anxiety rather than of pride and pleasure. It is a constrictive and disturbing, rather than an enlarging or emancipating force.<sup>38</sup>

Writing out of a less despondent point of view, Leslie Fiedler addresses himself to the theme of contemporary man's anguished struggle for self-definition through certain categories of myth and archetype. In Fiedler's analyses of Bellow's novels one of these

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36. Irving Malin, Jews and Americans (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), pp. 7-29.

37. Frederick Hoffman, "The Fool of Experience: Saul Bellow's Fiction," in Contemporary American Novelists, ed. Harry Moore (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), pp. 33-39.

38. Geismar, American Moderns, p. 223.

categories is the archetypal figure of the Jew. Fiedler finds Bellow's significance as a novelist is grounded in his focusing on the Jewish assimilation into the American scene and literary tradition.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, almost all of the contemporary critics of Bellow's work surveyed in this study present at some point in their criticism a close examination of the author's Jewish heritage. John J. Clayton, for example, presents a psychological analysis of Bellow's work which in part draws close to an ontological perspective. In his critical work, Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man, Clayton, however, also examines Bellow's work from an ethnological perspective, stating that Bellow's prose fiction is "moral" and "Jewish."

. . . it [Bellow's fiction] is moral fiction; it is not concerned with style for its own sake nor even with psychological revelation for its own sake; it considers such moral-metaphysical problems as the demarcation of human responsibility . . . and the relationship of the individual to the world of power . . . . Always it seeks to know why. Always it is concerned with the question of goodness--the failure or success of the sympathetic heart. It believes in man and in the potentiality of holiness and joy within the common life, the possibility of meaningful existence. To this extent it is Jewish fiction.<sup>40</sup>

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39. Leslie Fiedler, "Saul Bellow," in On Contemporary Literature, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Avon Books, 1964), pp. 62-78.

40. Clayton, Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man, p. 38.

Significant as the element of Bellow's Jewish heritage is to his writing, it is external to the individual reader's ontological involvement with a given Bellow persona.

Critics writing from a Christian perspective likewise tend to place a theological or allegorical concept between the reader and the work. In his critical work, Craters of the Spirit, Nathan A. Scott, Jr., for example, emphasizes Martin Luther's doctrine of sola gratia as the fundamental principle of Bellow's fiction. According to Scott, the "axial line" of Bellow's vision of the world, as expressed in the later books including Henderson The Rain King, is that:

. . . when striving stops, there it is, the infinitely poignant fullness and beauty of the very miracle of life itself. It begins to appear, in other words, that what we confront in this whole body of fiction is a radically religious perspective on the human reality. For though Mr. Bellow's protagonist is, characteristically, . . . a "creature of plans" and projects, the recognition that he has ultimately to achieve, his plans and projects must at last yield before those tidal rhythms of life which ordain (as it is put in one of the Anglican Prayerbook's most famous Collects) that "in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength," and that we shall be brought by the Spirit to that Presence "where we may be still . . . ."41

Whereas Scott admits that the whole of Bellow's thought cannot be contained within the "ambiance of things that are distinctively Christian," his critical argument does hold

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41. Scott, Craters of the Spirit, pp. 252-253.

Henderson The Rain King to be a dramatized "adventure in atonement," an allegorical commitment on the part of Bellow to the principle of sola gratia.<sup>42</sup> In a critical essay entitled, "Saul Bellow," Robert Detweiler also discusses Bellow's literature from the perspective of a theological understanding of human existence. Detweiler views faith and the imagination as equally essential to contemporary man's survival in the uncertain present. His primary focus in the analysis and discussion of Bellow's literary art is to reveal how the form of Bellow's art is significant to the Christian community. Detweiler states,

The kind of literary criticism called for . . . is to the artistic creation--the product of the imagination--what theology is to faith; it subjects the total existential reaction to an intellectual scrutiny from the standpoint of Christian commitment. This kind of criticism is also an act of faith itself, however, since it assumes without any possible proof that the serious literature that it treats will become transparent to ultimate reality and that the Christian theology from which it draws its concepts is still relevant for interpreting a response to that reality.<sup>43</sup>

As with Scott's analysis, Detweiler's discussion is focused primarily on an archetypal pattern, the birth-death-rebirth paradigm. As he notes, "Suffice it to say now that Bellow writes a vocabulary of salvation suitable to the modern understanding or at least the modern imagination,

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42. Scott, Craters of the Spirit, p. 254.

43. Robert Detweiler, Saul Bellow: A Critical Essay (New York: William B. Erdmans Publishing Co., 1967), p. 21.

just as St. Paul wrote for the first Gentile congregations."<sup>44</sup> By placing their critical emphasis upon the Christian theme of redemption, both Scott and Detweiler extend the distance between reader and author by placing a concept between the two.

In addition to social, ethnological, and theological criticism, Henderson The Rain King has brought forth numerous versions of symbolic, archetypal and other formalistic, system-focused analyses.<sup>45</sup> Such critical points of view, ultimately, attempt to reduce the novel to a concept relating to other, larger sociological, psychological, or anthropological constructs. Henderson is frequently described, for instance, as an Absurd Hero, Comic Idealist, or as an American Adam. A dominant symbolic-archetypal concept of Henderson is that of the persona as Victim. In his essay on Bellow in Saul Bellow and the Critics, Irving Malin, for example, characterizes the Bellow protagonist as a victim of the sense of displacement running through the age, mid-century. Modern life, characterized by an affluent society, the death of God, anxiety, innocence and guilt, alienation and accommodation is, to

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44. Detweiler, Saul Bellow, p. 32.

45. The writer of the study acknowledges that one cannot justly align any of the critics surveyed wholly within any one critical perspective. The terms used to describe various critical tendencies are in no way intended to fully describe or contain the entire body of thought of any of the critics surveyed.



contemporary man, an excessive burden. As Malin notes, the "weight" and "deformity" imagery in Bellow's novels demonstrates the fact that his protagonists labor under immense loads and pressures beyond their control.<sup>46</sup> In his essay, "Saul Bellow," Earl Rovit also adheres to the concept of the Bellow protagonist as a "victimized figure."

He [the Bellow hero] has no option except to submit to the implacable judgments of his lost family and religious traditions, even though his radical displacement has made these standards impossible for him to live up to. He is alone and fragmented because there is no whole place for him. He cannot will his mind to cease posing impossible questions and each reiterated question riddles the temporary security of his life. . . . It is in this sense . . . that the Bellow hero can be justly termed a . . . victimized figure, he is a victim of his own moral sense of right and wrong--his own accepted obligation to evaluate himself by standards that will inevitably find him lacking.<sup>47</sup>

That Bellow's heroes suffer intensely and reiterate their agonies in panoramic proportion cannot be refuted. "I am to suffering what Gary [Indiana] is to smoke," says Henderson himself, "one of the world's biggest operations."<sup>48</sup> To perceive Henderson as a victim-archetype, however, is to give emphasis to the pathetic impotence and static nature of the persona's life. From such an external point of

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46. Irving Malin (ed.), Saul Bellow and the Critics (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p. 43.

47. Earl Rovit, Saul Bellow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1967), p. 12.

48. Saul Bellow, Henderson The Rain King (New York: Compass Edition, The Viking Press, 1958), p. 260.

view, as both Malin and Rovit acknowledge, one may mistakenly view Henderson solely as a pathetic, frustrated figure: an individual with a penchant for passive lamentation and self-pitying surrender. There are other contemporary critics who interpret what they perceive to be Bellow's thematic preoccupation with the sufferer or victim as a device of compromise, a "making do" or accommodation. According to Richard Poirier, for instance, the Bellow protagonist's quest for reality ends in a kind of "mock submission to a cheery hope of redemption."<sup>49</sup> Henderson, from such a perspective, remains bound within his own individual problem of self-guilt and spiritual striving for redemption; he is wholly unable to escape the role fate assigned him as victim. Arguments such as those posed in portions of the criticism of Malin, Rovit, and Poirier imply that Henderson gratuitously surrenders the heroic ideal of a fully instinctual life to the expediency of survival within the status quo.

In the opinion of the writer of this study, such symbolically-oriented views miss the larger ironic and ontological ground-of-being. In the existential-ontological perspective, Henderson's fate is his character; his being-in-the-world cannot be separated from an ongoing awareness of his own destiny. Henderson's own moment-by-moment

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49. Richard Poirier, "Bellows to Herzog," Partisan Review, XXXII (Spring, 1965), pp. 264-271.

struggling, in other words, is his only authentic definition. Readers who find Henderson to be contemptibly self-conscious, alienated from nature and a true victim, are, for one example, bypassing the ontological dimensions of laughter as an anodyne for human misery. Modern comedy concerned with the disintegrating outline of the worthy and humane self, the bourgeois hero of an earlier age, reveals, ontologically, just such an involvement with the universal ground of being. And, as Bellow himself points out: "The narrowly confined and perfect unit of man, if we could find him now, would prove to be outside all that is significant in our modern lives, lives characterized by the new, provisional, changing, dangerous universal."<sup>50</sup>

Critical efforts to formularize Henderson's existence limit the reader's involvement with the self of the persona as a whole and unique individual. To categorize or label Henderson is to negate his existence as a being-in-the-world in the process of becoming. Rovit, for example, at one point refers to Henderson as a "strangely passive hero," one who incarnates a static immobility at the center of his existence. In this view, Henderson is only a type of personality characterized by a kind of metaphysical inertia rooted in introspective despair.

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50. Saul Bellow, "Distractions of a Fiction Writer," in The Living Novel: A Symposium, ed. Granville Hicks (New York: Macmillan Company, 1957), p. 44.

In their studied concern to be "exactly human" while avoiding the worst brutalities of human existence, Bellow's heroes cling to a pernicious closure of selfhood that tends to extinguish their most fundamental passions under the ashes of a bland passivity. And in full cognizance of what they have done to themselves, of what monstrous sin they have committed against God and mankind, they despair.<sup>51</sup>

From such a perspective, the seminal image one has of Henderson is not the image of a man seeking or becoming, but rather that of a man brooding in the midst of his solitude. To view Henderson as an unpassionate, self-conscious, brooding intellectual is to limit his existence to merely a fruitless identity-quest or an account of a symbolic journey through the lion-haunted regions of the underconsciousness. Within another critical frame of reference, Henderson is limited to an ambivalent and self-centered personality image.

. . . the Bellow hero is entangled in an inextricable skein of vacillation and dread. The barriers which he erects to ward off the crudity and abandon of the external world can become as much a stultifying prison as a means of self-protection. To dangle uncommitted or to fall into the abyss--these seem to be his only alternatives. And caught in that dilemma, . . . he can adequately express his anguish and outrage only in the accents of self-mockery and self-abuse.<sup>52</sup>

Viewed in such terms, Henderson seems only confused and contradictory. He becomes a brooding consciousness, a

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51. Rovit, Saul Bellow, pp. 27-28.

52. Rovit, Saul Bellow, p. 29.

posturing object lacking the moral energy to uphold a fully responsible position. From an external perspective Henderson's dilemma appears to be ambiguous. Considered ontologically, however, Henderson's existence is not just solipsistic brooding; it is, instead, his meaning suspended between stasis and action, between withdrawal and commitment. He is in a state of being and of becoming. In the ontological perspective, one cannot discount Henderson as solely an eccentric or passive or self-centered person. His torment persuades the reader otherwise. Such pathetic visions of Henderson presuppose limitations of natural and metaphysical fate upon him that seem to this writer unacceptable. That Henderson is aware that death is his fate and that his awareness of that fact is considerable is correct. But to say that he lives his life determined by that inevitability is not. He is too alive, too optimistic for that view. As Ihab Hassan says in Radical Innocence, "Eden has gone the dim abstract way of Utopia, as Bellow would be the first to agree, and the redemption of man, if redemption he needs, must come from the present acting upon itself."<sup>53</sup> Viewed ontologically, the present acting upon itself is the individual using the total resources of his being to create an affirmative existence. Neither

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53. Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 322.

affirmation nor negation are given, only what one makes of one's self and situation. The point, in Kierkegaard's terms, is that truth becomes reality only as the individual produces it in action, which includes producing it in his own consciousness.

The formularistic labels reviewed up to this point suggest the broad usage of possibilities within the single archetypal concept of Henderson as Victim. Whereas such labels add to the reader's knowledge about Henderson, they, at the same time, risk changing and limiting the reader's sense of the self of Henderson. Detweiler's choice of the words "type," "figure," "mold," in his discussion of how Bellow's characters conform to the character-types that Northrop Frye defines in his Anatomy of Criticism, illustrates how archetypal concepts can relegate the self of Henderson to a version of the container myth.

. . . I do want to point out the relationship of his [Frye's] alazon, eiron, and pharmakos types to Bellow's figures. The alazon, according to Frye, is a "deceiving or self-deceived character in fiction, normally an object of ridicule in comedy or satire . . . . In comedy he most frequently takes the form of miles gloriosus or a pedant." Augie would fit the mold; so would Henderson . . . . The pharmakos . . . is "the character in ironic fiction who has the role of a scapegoat or arbitrarily chosen victim." Every one of Bellow's main characters is a pharmakos type . . . including Henderson, who is literally sacrificed as a tribal scapegoat . . . . 54

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54. Detweiler, Saul Bellow, pp. 37-38.

From the perspective of Frye's character archetypes, the meaning of the self which is Henderson is mythically contained within a literary construct. Detweiler's analogy, one must acknowledge, is only a singular aspect of his critical thought on Bellow's prose fiction. The analogy does, however, reflect the same subject-object orientation of Detweiler's aforementioned theological critical-perspective.

Critical viewpoints advocating a formularistic, symbolic or archetypal analysis as an efficient, useful approach to Bellow's writing are difficult to oppose. throughout Henderson the Rain King there is an emphasis on the wealthy (three million dollars after taxes) Henderson as a kind of "knight" who, free of financial pressures (as in an almost Jamesian manner), is also free to seek true fulfillment outside of the artificialities of a contemporary life bound within society's compulsion for material success. Much of the novel--especially the opening description of Henderson's bizarre life as a pig-raising, law-breaking, violin-playing offspring (the "child") of an old and distinguished American family--is reminiscent of the picaresque tradition. Furthermore, when Henderson journeys into the heart of a non-realistic ("absurd" or "symbolic") Africa, the novel also moves toward what could be termed the "grail tradition." In bringing rain to the dry land, Henderson lifts the curse from the realm of the

"Fisher King" and, in turn, flees to safety with the cub lion ("Risen King"). He cleanses a "wasteland" which could be Biblical, Shakesperian, and like the contemporary wasteland of T. S. Eliot as well. Perceived in terms of symbolic systems, the novel becomes a verbal and visual referent for various archetypal and mythological patterns. In terms of such patterns, Henderson becomes a representation of fate's victim, an amalgam of Holden Caulfield and Papa Hemingway, the American Adam, the questing hero, conscious seeker or pilgrim in progress. He even has a representation of Sancho Panza, Queequeg, Virgil and Hopeful in his guide, Romilayu, given an archetypal or mythological frame of reference. Whereas all of these symbolic ingredients are significant to the structure of the novel, they are not, considered together, a sum total of what the novel is. To perceive the novel ontologically is to avoid searching for symbolic systems and to avoid over-emphasizing the seriousness of the work's obvious analogies. Henderson is a questing figure, a clumsy knight-errant, a comic idealist and self-conscious sufferer, just as he is a "Rain King." Yet, within the ontological perspective, one must see him first as a human being rather than as a symbol or as an embodiment of various myths. A reader can, and invariably is compelled to, approach Henderson's character through the symbolic and mythological suggestions which surround him. The ontologically-focused



reader, however, sees Henderson as an "archetype" in his own right, a character with sufficient substance and importance to stand alone. So viewed, Henderson greets the reader as a person, as a unique being-in-the-world. The symbolic and mythological suggestions surrounding Henderson, become, in the ontological perspective, expressions of that beingness.

Archetypal and symbolic-focused accounts of Bellow's thought are important and useful in any reading of the novel, Henderson the Rain King. Some critical assessments of the novel which are symbolically focused reject total adherence to a given pattern or formula. Those analyses addressing themselves to the novel's experiential and psychological elements are particularly helpful. John Jacob Clayton, for example, views Bellow's novel in one aspect as contemporary parody.

Bellow's novel is a parody of the questing bourgeois self speaking of love but more concerned with its own improvement and fulfillment. We are to laugh at Henderson's quest. It is not merely the contrast of gross millionaire and airy quest which is funny ("The Kingdom of Heaven is for children of the spirit. But who is this nosy, gross phantom?"); the humor lies in the quest itself--the egotistic quest for personal fulfillment.<sup>55</sup>

By addressing his critical appraisal, through the concept of contemporary parody, to the self and to the humor that is Henderson, Clayton is suggesting to the reader the

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55. Clayton, Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man, p. 169.

importance of being aware of Henderson's psychic patterns. The implication of Clayton's approach is that insights can be gained by reading the novel dramatically as an exploration of the psychic pattern of Henderson's states of mind. In his essay entitled, "Saul Bellow: The Flight from Monologue," the English critic, Tony Tanner, also suggests the importance of recognizing the interior states of mind of Bellow's characters.

Failing to experience any specific sense of relationship with other people and contemporary society, Bellow's characters respond to a more mystical sense of one-ness with some "larger body" which is transpersonal and relates them to the very currents of Being. Outcasts of society, they yet have moments when they feel at home in the universe.<sup>56</sup>

Although, from an ontological perspective, one cannot accept the concept of Henderson as alienated, it is important to be aware, as Tanner suggests, of the character's moment-to-moment feelings and states of mind. In another critical account of Bellow's novel, Ihab Hassan goes beyond the limitations of exteriorly-focused accounts when he confronts Henderson in light of the persona's individual, spiritual quest for reality.<sup>57</sup> Whereas Hassan's analysis gives the novel a larger context than do accounts dwelling on the alienation or quest analogies alone, his complex

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56. Tony Tanner, "Saul Bellow: The Flight from Monologue," Encounter, XXIV (February, 1965), p. 66.

57. Hassan, Radical Innocence, pp. 290-324.

points of view leave the reader still unable to see the novel as a whole and unsure as to what the reader's particular concern in the novel is or ought to be. What is of particular importance in the criticism of Clayton, Tanner, and Hassan, is that, despite divergent ideas about the novel, they suggest that Henderson's credibility as a person is gained through his contemporaneous individuality as he strives to live out of the past and into the future. Bellow's novel, in other words, can be shown to contain various symbolic or archetypal systems, but it may also be understood largely on the immediate sensory level if it is approached existentially from the point of view of the reader's ontological stake in it. Furthermore, the appearance of archetypal and symbolic patterns in the thought of modern psychoanalysis and that of the author, Bellow, are capable of being universally intuited by virtue of the fact that they are archetypes. Bellow's Henderson has meaning only insofar as the reader brings his knowledge and insight to bear on the experiences of the persona. Concepts about the novel may be instructive but not definitive.

What Bellow urges, as well as what he attempts to create in his novels, is a depiction of man as subangelic. But to define what subangelic man is, just what the term means, and, equally important, what it does not mean is a difficult task. The difficulty lies in the fact that the term has nothing to do with the figure observed; the meaning is to be found within the observer.

Hence, all definition is subjective. "Sub-angelical," when applied to man, is an attitude toward man, not a description of man.<sup>58</sup>

Bellow, like his major critics, acknowledges that his work relates to the themes of the individual versus society, the individual in self-conflict, the individual in flight from death or in search of reality, and to the quest for affirmation and identity. He strongly advocates, however, that the reader not regard such themes as formulas, contexts, or abstract systems within which his work should be read.<sup>59</sup> Rather, one should see such thematic systems as a series of states of mind revealing the ontological concerns of Bellow's individual characters. As Robert R. Dutton points out, everyone, by virtue of being alive in the world, participates in such concerns.

Philosophically, the heroes of Bellow are in the Sartrean position of the en-soi versus the pour-soi: the being-in-itself versus the being-for-itself. Unlike the stone whose being can never transcend itself, and which is therefore complete and whole in itself, a being-in-itself, man, blessed or cursed with an imaginative consciousness, is forever in a state of transcendence, or in a state of being-for-itself, as well as being-in-itself. Through his imagination, man would be something other than what he is or what he seems to be; for what he is, or seems to be, is an irritatingly unsatisfying and discomfiting mystery, a mystery to which depth and breadth are given with every stretch of his imagination.

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58. Robert R. Dutton, Saul Bellow (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1971), p. 16.

59. Saul Bellow, "Deep Readers of the World, Beware!," New York Times Book Review (February 15, 1959), pp. 1-34.

Bellow's novels are narrative dramatizations of the fact of this dilemma of existence; they are a working-out not to a resolution, but to a revelation of a human condition.<sup>60</sup>

Writing as critic, Bellow speaks to the same point in his essay, "Distractions of a Fiction Writer." Maintaining that novelists in the past have often failed to note the positive factor in the human equation of en-soi versus the pour-soi, Bellow rejects adherence to systems equating the contemporary literary hero with any analogous depiction or representation.

If man wretched by nature is represented, what we have here is only accurate reporting. But if it is man in the image of God, man a little lower than the angels who is important, the case is not the same . . . . On the nobler assumption (the subangelic one) he (Man) should have at least sufficient power to overcome ignominy and to complete his own life. His suffering, feebleness, servitude then have a meaning. This is what writers have taken to be the justification of power . . . . And, if no other power will do this, the power of the imagination will take the task upon itself.<sup>61</sup>

As a novelist who accepts the truth of the imagination, Bellow opposes the critical tendency to separate the self of the reader from the immediate sensory experience by explaining or intellectualizing the sensory experience out of existence by means of a formularistic system. As novelist, Bellow is aligned with the reality of sensory

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60. Dutton, Saul Bellow, p. 14.

61. Bellow, "Distractions of a Fiction Writer," p. 15.

perception and the inseparable relationship between that perception and the imagination and mental attitude of the perceiving reader. However instructive an external viewpoint may be for purposes of gaining knowledge about a novel, it has only limited use as a route to knowing the reality or being of a work. To limit Bellow's Henderson the Rain King to a "testament to the absurd man" or any other formularistic account, is to extend the experiential distance between the novel and the reader. The material of the novel may be about the seeming absurdity of man, but that is not what the novel is as being-in-the-world. The novel is, rather, the relationship between the state of mind of the reader and the state of mind of the author, Bellow. These states of mind are based in an ontological concern of reader and author, both of whom are beings in the process of becoming. The mutuality of ontological concern should free the reader from distanced conceptual approaches to Bellow. Simultaneously, such a concern should, also, enable a reader to avoid personal or unsharable interpretations.

In an article entitled, "Machines and Storybooks," Bellow describes his journey, as novelist, within the context of the traditional opposition between art and technology. Remarking on the extent to which modern society imposes itself upon the life of the individual, Bellow reasserts his argument for the necessity of trusting

one's own perceptions. The individual who substitutes what Bellow calls "the story of society" for the line of his own life-narrative condemns himself to an unending study of public images irrelevant to his own being-in-the-world. Nothing in the public image reflects an image of the individual self. Adherence to public or media images of man results in the loss of personal identity. The tendency of contemporary man to see himself through a series of public images has had, according to Bellow, a negative effect on the state of contemporary criticism. Rather than adhering to the truth of the imagination, contemporary criticism has become, in Bellow's appraisal, fact-oriented at considerable expense to both the reading public and the literary artist.

A single standard has been set for novelists and for experts--the fact standard. The result of this strict accountability has been to narrow the scope of the novel, to make the novelist doubt his own powers and the right of his imagination to range over the entire world. The authority of the imagination has declined . . . technology . . . is the triumph of the accurate power of innumerable brains and wills acting in unison. These many wills constitute a fictive superself, astonishingly effective in converting dreams into machines. Literature, by contrast, is produced by the single individual, concerns itself with individuals, and is read by separate persons. And the single individual--this unit of vital being, of nerve and brain, which judges or knows, is happy or mourns, actually lives and actually dies--is unfavorably compared with that fictive superself,

which, acting in unison and according to plan,  
produces modern technological wonders.<sup>62</sup>

Adherence to a system, to a technological or fact standard, ultimately discredits the essential understanding of the single self. In Bellow's viewpoint, the contemporary reader needs to renew trust in his own intuitive inclinations and in the immediate experience of a work of literature as it relates to the reader's own powers of imagination and on-going states of mind. Efforts to explain a Bellow novel, therefore, in terms of a static plan or formularistic system are unsatisfactory in that they limit and change the work's being. The technical, fact standard approach to literature is based in an imagination-curtailling and non-productive notion that a novel is about something in which the reader is essentially uninvolved. The reader may be informed but he is not an active participant in the experiential dimension of the work. To adhere to a system or fact standard is to view a literary work as an object rather than as an active sensory experience in which both author and reader are personally engaged.

To summarize, Saul Bellow's contemporary American novel, Henderson the Rain King has brought forth a considerable amount of criticism adhering to the subject-object perspective. Critics either tend to apply

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62. Saul Bellow, "Machines and Storybooks: Literature in the Age of Technology," Harper's Magazine, Vol. 249, No. 1491 (August, 1974), pp. 50-51.



formularistic-system approaches or else they tend to rely on concepts about Bellow's symbolic and archetypal complexities. Both the external system and conceptual approaches tend to divert attention from the novel as being. To adhere to either critical perspective, one must be constantly reaching toward one or another formula or concept and relating that formula or concept to one's self and world. Within either viewpoint, the novel becomes an abstraction, an idea about the condition of man as absurd, for example, or of a quest for redemption or the affirmation of reality. Such critical perspectives also tend to limit the persona, Henderson, to a "presence" or abstraction of, for instance, an idealist, sufferer, victim, or quiotic blunderer. The external system and conceptual approaches to Bellow's novel may, indeed, call attention to the complexities, ironies, and paradoxes of the work, but as reader, one feels no nearer the novel for having read them. Both methods of interpretation overlook the novel through failure to place it in an ontological context.

An existential-ontological perspective might limit the shortcomings of either a formularistic-system or conceptual approach by providing an interpretative context in which the novel is immediately available to the reader. Within such a context, the reader, drawing from his knowledge and particular literary and life experiences,

furnishes his own complexities. To perceive Bellow's novel in this manner may appear to relegate it to the risks of extreme subjectivism. An ontological approach, however, always contains the possibility of such risks. Considering the philosophy which can be drawn from Bellow's own works of criticism, the novelist is himself aligned with the ontological perspective and views such risks as the reader's exposure of self to be not only worthwhile but necessary to his (the reader's) experience and sense of self. The objective of an ontological exploration of Bellow's novel is concentrated on establishing a ground-of-being in which both author and reader can meet within the immediate moment of their respective existences in the world. The ontological approach attempts to avoid reducing the novel to either a thematic or conceptual account. It also attempts to avoid one's viewing the novel in terms of a formula or series of symbolic ideas pointing toward a concept or system of thought.

The existential-ontological perspective, in review, implies a broad critical dimension. The perspective adheres to an ultimate ground of being which unites all things--the experiencing self, nature, the ego, and the world. The ontological approach to literature promises to allow the individual reader to experience fully the being, the immediate reality of a literary work. Proceeding from this frame of reference, the discussion presented in

Chapter III demonstrates how a vital contemporary-interpreter-contemporary-literature relationship provides critical interpretations different from those produced by either a sentimental or an intellectually external consideration of the work alone.

### CHAPTER III

#### AN EXISTENTIAL-ONTOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF HENDERSON THE RAIN KING

The design of the discussion presented in this chapter is comprised of the following objectives: (1) to briefly review the direction and concerns of the existential-ontological perspective; (2) to demonstrate an immediate (moment-to-moment) application of the existential-ontological attitude to Bellow's novel; (3) to present observations on the persona's, Henderson's, transcendence from a condition lacking authenticity to a state of authentic being; and (4) to summarize the relationship between the persona and the existential-ontologically-focused reader.

#### A Review of Aspects of the Existential- Ontological Perspective

The relative obscurity of such terms as "ontological," "self," "being," "becoming," and "world," mentioned early in the study, may attain further clarification of meaning given a short review prior to their use in conjunction with the existential-ontological interpretation of Bellow's novel. First, human dasein is (in the Heideggerian sense of the term) characterized as "being-in-the-world." This state is dasein's fundamental constitution

and innermost essence. The characterization is not meant in the factual sense but, rather, in an "ontological" sense which means that dasein can be in existence, that is, as "dasein," because man's essential constitution is "being-in-the-world." The term "world" indicates that "state," the "how" in which beings are "in-the-whole." Thus "world" is that whereto dasein "transcends" so as to be what it is. Furthermore, the term "world" designates primarily, in the Heideggerian view, neither the sum total of things of nature nor a fundamental characteristic of the community of men; it means, instead, the "how" in which things are "in-the-whole" implicitly related to human dasein. When a person is placed amidst a multitude of "other" beings "in-the-whole," or when a person lets things "be" merely as they are, the fundamental characterization of human dasein as "being-in-the-world" is in the background; and it should be borne in mind that this proposition is essentially different from any statement about something that is vorhanden, that is something in the natural world such as a tree or a star is in the world. "Being-in-the-world" is, therefore, a unitary phenomenon. The "in" in this connection is of a nature entirely different from the "in" applied to any phenomenon that is vorhanden. Thus if a "thing" is "in" something else, the resulting relationship is "spatial." When dasein, on the other hand, is "in" something the relationship is not primarily

spatial; it takes on the meaning of to "dwell," to "sojourn," to "stay," in the sense of the Latin word, habitare. A match is, for example, in a matchbox in the plain, spatial sense; but if a person is in her home, or office, or in an oceanside community, the relationship is obviously not primarily spatial. The writer of the present study has given express reference to the "in-being" (In-Sein), as Heidegger terms this characteristic of human dasein, because it is a particularly significant part of the discussion to follow. "In-being" includes the potentiality of man (as dasein) to fall prey to "things" in the world and to become alienated from his own authentic possibilities, intentions, and endeavors.

The second point to be emphasized is the nature of the "who" of dasein. The "who" of dasein is not to be taken as an isolated "subject" or "self," independent of the "world," of what is vorhanden and zuhanden (the world of "other" fellow-beings) or of the world with whom the "I" (unique being) is "there." Unlike dasein, the "self" exists together with its fellow-beings and more as a "man," that is, as "one like many," than as an "I." Since a major concern in Bellow's novel is how Henderson (as dasein) attains authenticity, the ways in which his "self" is together with "others" in daily life, the sway which these "others" hold over his "self," and the resulting levelling tendency in his community life are focused. Primarily

there is not "I" as one's own "self," but the others and "I" as one among many others. Yet "one like many" is a genuine existentialistic trait of the constitution of dasein; and the authentic self-being (Selbstein) is not something entirely separate from the "one like many," but is an existential modification of it. Umwelt (dasein's relationship to the "environment" in the widest sense, including all that is vorhanden and zuhanden) and Mitwelt (one's being together with a vast multitude of beings of dasein's own kind) as well as the basic of "self-being" in the form of the "one like many" are the primary existential-ontological characteristics employed in the present writer's interpretations of the ontological nature of Henderson as dasein or being-in-the-world. Secondary ontological terms such as "care" (sorge) and "dread" (angst) used in this study are focused as they emerge within the experiential world of the novel.

Approaching the novel from an existential-ontological perspective, the reader will first ask why he and Bellow should adopt the viewpoint of the persona, Henderson. External or sentimental reasons and preconceived empathetic attitudes are to be avoided. To empathize or sentimentally identify with the situation of the persona, allows one to assume, at the outset a basic attitude toward the novel. A preconceived attitude keeps the self of the reader essentially distanced and uninvolved

with that of the persona. To empathize with Henderson's situation as absurd, alienated, comic, or unjust, for example, is to take no account of what the novel is to the self of the reader who may or may not have feelings of absurdity, alienation, comedic idealism, or injustice. Adherence to an exterior attitude, ultimately, causes one to view the being of oneself and that of the persona as objects capable of being calculated, managed, or analyzed. The tendency in such a viewpoint is to believe that understanding derives from the right technique or exterior attitude. The ontological perspective holds to the exact opposite, namely, that technique and attitude follow understanding. The central task and responsibility of the interpreter, therefore, is to seek to understand the persona and himself as being and as beings-in-the-world. All preconceived attitudes and technical considerations are subordinate to this understanding. Without this understanding, prior attitudes and technical reference frames are at best irrelevant, and at worst, methods of structuralizing the existences of both reader and persona. Given such an understanding, the groundwork is laid for the interpreter's being able to recognize and experience his own existence and that of the persona. The intent of the writer of this study is not to derogate the importance of technique and empathy, but rather to place both in perspective.



The context of an ontological approach is distinct in that it focuses on the question of how the self of the reader as being-in-the-world is involved with the particular existences in the world of both author and persona. The concern resides within the question of where reader, author, and persona are from moment-to-moment and what they, respectively, are moving toward becoming in their states of existence. The existential-ontological context views these selves not as separate sets of individual psychic dynamisms or mechanisms, but as human beings who are choosing, committing, and pointing themselves toward something right now. The existential-ontological context, in short, is dynamic, organic, immediately real, and present. In Heidegger's analysis of existence, the existential-ontological context is based in the conception that man can no longer be understood in terms of some attitude or theory--be it mechanistic, biological, or psychological.<sup>1</sup>

In approaching the novel Henderson the Rain King, existentially, the reader, therefore, ought to experience the work dramatically as an exploration of moment-to-moment states of mind in which he, Bellow, and Henderson are all active participants. At the onset, the reader needs to

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1. Ludwig Binswanger, "Existential Analysis and Psychotherapy," in Progress in Psychotherapy, ed. by Fromm-Reichmann and Moreno (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1956), p. 144.

enter the situation, hear who is speaking, and sense that he has a particular stake in the basic ontological concern uniting reader and author in the work.

A Demonstration of the Existential-Ontological  
Attitude Applied to Henderson  
the Rain King

Given the existential-ontological context, the reader enters the novel on the immediate level of sense perception, since that is where both he and the persona are and where their common situation begins. One will not merely perceive that a fifty-five year old male named Eugene H. Henderson is speaking, but that a man is speaking from a peculiarly innocent though imaginative point of view.

In the opening chapters of the novel, Henderson, trying to explain why he suddenly left for Africa, comments that "Things got worse and worse and pretty soon they were too complicated."

When I think of my condition at the age of fifty-five when I bought the ticket, all is grief. The facts begin to crowd around me and soon I get a pressure in the chest. A disorderly rush begins-- my parents, my wives, my girls, my children, my farm, my animals, my habits, my money, my music lessons, my drunkenness, my prejudices, my brutality, my teeth, my face, my soul! I have to cry, "No, no, get back curse you, let me alone!" But how can they let me alone? They belong to me They are mine. And they pile into me from all sides. It turns into chaos.<sup>2</sup>

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2. Bellow, Henderson the Rain King, p. 3. Hereafter references to Henderson the Rain King will be made in text with the abbreviation HRK and the page number.

Speaking in such terms, Henderson is thinking with his senses, speaking from the immediate level of sensory experience, not separating himself from his thoughts by translating them into concepts. The statement of his "condition at age fifty-five" suggests a correlation between himself and his world. He is, in this respect, innocent of any notion of himself as an absurd man, pathetic idealist, or comic sufferer. The reader's adoption of any of these concepts is, therefore, not relevant in the immediate moment. At this point, Henderson simply finds himself involved in a kind of tension between his sense of himself and the predicament of his world filled as it is with "parents," "wives," "girls," "animals," "drunkenness," "prejudices," and so forth. The fact that Henderson perceives and remarks on this tension in the particular way that he does, however, presupposes the attitude, "I feel grief and chaos." To be in a condition of grief and chaos is not necessarily to feel grief and chaos. Henderson's perception of himself as being in such a condition, consequently, is not so much a literal fact as it is the expression of an attitude toward himself which he has developed. One is as one perceives himself to be, and Henderson perceives himself to be in grief and chaos. Bellow's intent, presumably, is not limited to an idea of Henderson as an object of contemporary society's frustrations and enigmas, regardless of how true such an

identification may be. What is of importance is that Henderson has internalized a certain ideal point of view (expressible only in terms of "I want") and that he sees himself as existing in a condition short of that ideal state of existence. His trip to Africa, Henderson assuredly states by the third paragraph of the novel, at last provides an end to the grief and chaos of his condition: ". . . the world which I thought so mighty an oppressor has removed its wrath from me" (HRK, p. 3). Ontologically perceived, Henderson's statement calls forth a certain feeling of hopefulness and release. It cannot, however, be regarded as truth or as reality by sheer virtue of its appearance in the novel. Given the province of an inner, subjective reality, the reader is released from any bondage to the dogma of truth as understandable only in terms of external statements or objects. The point is that for both Bellow and the reader the meaning of the objective (or phantasized) fact depends on how one relates to it; there is no existential truth which can omit the relationship. One could take this point as far as to say that, unless the reader is a real and immediate participant in the relationship and consciously recognizes this fact, he will not be able to discern with clarity what is in fact taking place in the world of the novel. Clarification of the existential-ontological relationship between author and reader can only be accomplished by a full awareness of the

existential situation, that is, the real living relationship. When one is dealing with author and persona as human beings, no truth has reality by itself; it is always dependent upon the reality of the immediate relationship to the reader. This is to say, that the truth of Henderson's statement ". . . the world which I thought so mighty an oppressor has removed its wrath from me," becomes reality only as both Henderson and the reader produce it in action, which includes producing it in their own respective consciousnesses. Whereas the reader has no reason to doubt the veracity of the persona's statement, it has no immediate vitality for the reader who has yet to experience the fact through his own sensory perception. What is important for the reader is to perceive Henderson as he perceives himself in the immediate moment and in terms of what he is rather than what he may or may not represent or what one may assume him to be. Given this perspective, Henderson's "condition" becomes a major ontological concern of all human beings: there is for every living human being a split between body and spirit, existence and essence. Everyone, in other words, feels at some moment in existence a discrepancy between what he is and what he believes he really is or ought to be in some significant aspect of his being.

The concern of the novel, thus, is to effect a transformation in point of view so that Henderson, while

remaining in a chaotic and frustrating predicament, no longer feels grief nor frustration nor chaos. The reader should see that the transformation will be metaphoric or imaginative before and regardless of whether it is literal. The transformation should be viewed as a change in vision. To perceive it as such is to avoid the pitfalls of critics who regard the conclusion of the novel to be inadequate on the basis of its connotative, sentimental solution to the predicament of contemporary man as mere wishful thinking. For both Bellow and the ontologically-focused reader, Henderson is an active visionary being, not a passive sensual substance. An inseparable aspect of active being is the fundamental drive to live out one's potentia. And, Henderson has a central and dynamic need to bring his inner potentialities into birth in action. Being alive, he has an inherent need to expand and grow and to avoid letting his existence in the world be merely a thoughtless accident. His wholeness of being, composed of the inseparable compound of body-spirit, makes such a vision possible. The body-spirit is not merely a material substance but, rather, a metaphysical entity that changes moment-to-moment according to one's attitude toward himself. Transformation, therefore, is imaginative and consists in the evolution of a point of view toward oneself. From an imaginative point of view, then, the personal selfhood becomes a source of energy which compels everyone to recognize that

he is first an imaginative substance and that he exists as a person only in the context of the spiritual dimension of his existence. In short, the pain of alienation, which Henderson acknowledges in the "wrath" of an "oppressor" world, ultimately disintegrates the natural body awareness, so that the real being of the spiritual and imaginative self may be revealed. The relationship between personal selfhood and real being is Henderson's struggle, and, ontologically, everyone's concern.

Henderson's feeling of suffering grief and chaos is a condition resulting from his not being what he really is. His non-being existence results from his tendency to regard himself from an external, non-suffering or other world point of view. He sees himself, in other words, not in terms of his own particular being but rather in terms of his being state in an environment of "others"--of "parents," "wives," "girls," "children,"--who are not identical to himself, although they "belong" to him and he to them. As Henderson states later in the novel, "Society is what beats me. Alone I can be pretty good, but let me go among people and there's the devil to pay" (HRK, p. 49).

Henderson's felt frustration, his chaotic "condition," serves as a means of perceiving the human condition in which one feels separated from one's real being, a condition Heidegger regards as "fallen" or "inauthentic." Sahakian describes Heidegger's view of the inauthentic

state, commenting that

. . . Dasein is authentic when he is something of his own, and inauthentic when he is busy, excited preoccupied. . . . Inauthenticity is to be distinguished from the authentic self by being recognized as a they-self, that is as the group self, the public self, or as a part of the social existence into which the self is dispersed, falling into anonymity and depersonalization. Having fallen (fallenness) into inauthentic Being,<sup>3</sup> such an individual is susceptible to publicness.

To say that Henderson is "fallen" is to say that his authentic self has dispersed itself into the form of body-spirit in which he now exists. Ontologically perceived, the redemption of his imaginative and authentic self must be achieved if Henderson is to regain his real being. In Henderson's literal world, his irascibility, decaying teeth, music lessons, eccentric tendencies, and constant activities become outer symbols for a state of mind that needs to be transformed. By the end of the third paragraph of the novel one perceives a tension between Henderson and his world, between Henderson's external personality and his internal need to exist as an authentic being-in-the-world. Ontologically, one feels the existential anxiety of inauthenticity. Yet, the experience of anxiety itself suggests that some potentiality is present, some new possibility of being.

Henderson's energetic effort and striving for authentic being begins in the midst of a series of

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3. Sahakian, History of Philosophy, p. 350.



experiences which motivate him to seek new territory, a different environment--to leave for Africa. During the opening portions of the novel, Henderson relates a number of circumstances of his existence which provide him with a rationale for going to Africa. As noted earlier, Henderson, in the opening passage of the novel, is suffering from an awareness of the particular social and philosophical maladies characterizing his existence. His awareness of his own sense of paralysis in existence is apparent in the tension between his anxiety and his actual behavior. He describes the ontological tension, for example, by saying, ". . . when things got very bad I often looked into books to see whether I could find some helpful words, and one day I read, 'The forgiveness of sins is perpetual and righteousness first is not required.' This impressed me so deeply that I went around saying it to myself. But then I forgot which book it was" (HRK, p. 3). The message which so impresses Henderson has no real effect. In this moment of his existence he is unable to accept an idea that would seem to compound his feelings of paralysis. "Forgiveness" with no required "righteousness" removes all personal responsibility of the self. It reduces the self to a passive entity. Although Henderson searches through volume after volume, he cannot find the book containing the "forgiveness" statement. Despite his grief, one feels a certain admiration for him. Regardless of his disorganized

or bungling inability to find a particular item, one may perceive him to be a person who in some level of his sense-of-self is able to reject forfeiting responsibility for that self. In-the-moment he can be seen not merely as comic or frustrated but also as one who is too genuine to escape into an idea that would grant him franchise to self-delusion. Frustrated as he is in his immediate condition, he is incapable on some level-of-awareness of running away from his authentic beingness. Yet as Henderson perceives himself in-the-moment, the struggle is bound to the external world. As he notes later in the novel, "It was a question of spirit, too, for when it comes to struggling I am in a special class. From the earliest times I have struggled without rest" (HRK, p. 68). A few paragraphs later he says, "Somehow I could never make myself lose any contest, no matter how hard I tried" (HRK, p. 69). The point here is not to refute the obvious intensity of Henderson's self-awareness. What is to be noted is that he describes himself, quite early in the novel, in terms of categories and past experiences and behaviors. In essence, he labels his present-moment-existence in terms of what he perceives himself to have always been. Locked into a concept of himself, Henderson is susceptible to the disruptive emotions and anxieties of ontological guilt. Given his external self-concept, Henderson's present-moment instincts have not been given free play and, therefore, they turn

inward causing him frustration and grief. Under the external circumstances of his "wives," "parents," "children," "girls," and "animals" and his own self-concept, based in past behavior, Henderson's instinct of present-moment freedom is latent. Driven underground or sublimated, his freedom of authentic self is forced to vent its energy upon that self. Henderson, therefore, is in chaos.

The writer of this study has given particular emphasis to the experiential dimensions of the first page of the novel in order to demonstrate the importance of greeting Henderson specifically in his moment-to-moment existence. Ideally, the existential-ontological focused reader should give equally close reading and response to each line in the literary work. To know Henderson as a unique being-in-the-world, one must give one's self over to a total response to each of the persona's statements and actions. To proceed with such specificity in this discussion would, however, not only be impractical but, also, it would tend to obscure the major transitions in Henderson's and the reader's various stages of becoming and being. From this point on, therefore, as a general guide, the narrative will be followed with reference given only to the major points of illumination as they occur in the sensorium uniting author and reader.

From the first page on throughout the opening passages of the novel, Henderson is suffering from an acute awareness of the ailments of his society and the philosophical infirmities which characterize his existence. One senses in him an almost morbid depression of the spirit. The feeling of a compulsion to grief leads him to battle drunkenly with the state troopers of Danbury, Connecticut, to argue with his wife, Lily, to alienate his son and daughter, to refuse his tenants heat during the winter, to fire his forty-five revolver at their cat, and to rage and shout in such a voice that the elderly maid, Miss Lenox, succumbs to a heart attack. Henderson also decides to raise and breed pigs on his lawn and in his flower gardens. He notes that the action "maybe" illustrates what he thinks of life in general. One senses the delighted joy and pleasure the livestock bring to Henderson in-the-moment. The pigs, a considerable cause of annoyance to family and neighbors, are one of a number of harassments that Henderson's particular behavior causes the community of "others." From a community or external, family perspective, Henderson's behavior is unpredictable, irrational, and frequently violent. He is, exteriorly viewed, a displaced and misdirected eccentric. One senses, however, that such exterior-erratic behavior is grounded in Henderson's need to distance himself from the "others" in order to save his own awareness of being. That Henderson

lacks a full sense of being is apparent in his tendency in-the-moment to subordinate his existence to his function. He, in other words, knows himself not as man or self but as, among other roles, a millionaire pig-farmer. Generally, modern man is in such a condition. Rather than knowing one's self as woman or self, one may first think in terms of a social or economic function. To think of one's self as a waitress, professor, or member of the stock exchange is to label and negate the authentic self. To subordinate existence to function reduces one's ontological demands (if they are even present) to the level of a dulled or obscure impulse. To a degree, Henderson, however, seems particularly aware of his own absence of being. His impulsive actions give testimony to a level-of-awareness that distances him from passivity. That same level-of-awareness also distances him from the community of in-authentic selves.

Henderson's recognition of his external-world displacement is evidenced by the fact that he regards himself as inferior in value (or economic function) to his pigs: "Taxwise, even the pigs were profitable. I couldn't lose money. But they were killed and they were eaten. They made ham and gloves and gelatin and fertilizer. What did I make? Why, I made a sort of trophy, I suppose. A man like me may be something like a trophy" (HRK, p. 24). Henderson's need to discover his authentic self, therefore,

is precipitated by his awareness of feelings of uselessness.

What do you do with yourself if you have a temperament like mine? A student of mine once explained to me that if you inflict your anger on inanimate things, you not only spare the living, as a civilized man ought to do, but you get rid of the bad stuff in you. This seemed to make good sense, and I tried it out. I tried with all my heart, chopping wood, lifting plowing, laying cement blocks, pouring concrete, and cooking mash for the pigs. On my own place, stripped to the waist like a convict, I broke stones with a sledgehammer. It helped, but not enough. Rude begets rude, and blows, blows; at least in my case; it not only begot but it increased. Wrath increased with wrath (HRK, p. 23).

Suspecting that truth might "come in blows," Henderson attempts to purge himself of a violence of spirit through violent actions. Despite all of his effort and his awareness of being in an anxious condition his grief continues to flourish. He notes that earlier in his life he has considered suicide as a salvation from the pain of his grief. From the ontological perspective, one must reject any notion of the "consideration" as tied to a true or realistic evaluation. As long as Henderson is to some degree aware of an absence of authentic self, he is incapable of denying existence altogether. Certainly, suicide would remove the pain of grief, but it would not solve the problem of the separation between his essence and existence.

The fact that suicide is not an acceptable option for Henderson is born out in what would be paradoxical

behavior, given an external point of view. Henderson's immediate relationship with Lily provides an example of such behavior. Having spent several painful months in Paris trying to adjust to a disintegrating first marriage and to new dental work, he meets Lily, an American, with whom he had once had an affair. Together, they spend some time visiting the famous cathedrals of France. Soon, however, Henderson, growing disgusted with her lies and petty habits, decides to send her back to Paris alone. He has threatened her with his suicide unless she ceases to annoy him. Yet on the same occasion he shouts in a rage that she will never be able to "kill" him since he is "too rugged!" Ontologically perceived, there is no paradox between Henderson's threats to end his life and the fact that he somehow feels that remaining with Lily will accomplish the same end. Lily is incapable of driving him to suicide since two lives are at stake within Henderson: his physical presence and his spiritual essence. At the moment Henderson's awareness of this is limited, but present. He seems to sense that in his present condition his life could be reduced to a mirror image of those around him. As he is in-the-moment, he is fundamentally unwilling to empty whatever exists of "self" of its vitality and originality. He is, therefore, able to resist reducing the world of his marriage to the conformity of a mere social relationship. Some insight or inner gestalt in the self needs to reform

itself before authenticity can be present in his intra-personal world. Henderson will not settle for a hollow or sterile version of existence. He refuses to "adjust." Again, on some level-of-awareness Henderson is able to sense that were he to "adjust" to Lily (or any other person) he would be taking that person as an instrumentality rather than as a true being (as Dasein). Ontologically, even if one adjusts to one's self one is using one's self as an object--an external entity. Viewed ontologically, therefore, Henderson's suicide threats cannot, as some writers have suggested, be taken wholly as either comic or pathetic. Rather, they reflect the subliminal tensions and conscious resistance of an emerging "authentic" self, that is, a self aware to some degree of being in such a condition--from the realm of an inauthentic self, lacking all such awareness. What feeling, knowledge, and will Henderson possesses derive from his considerable imagination. Imagination is here taken to be the possibility of all reflection, and its intensity is held to be the possibility of the intensity of the self. In Lily there is an absence of such imagination. As Henderson complains, "From start to finish Lily had just this one topic, moralizing: one can't live for this but has to live for that; not evil but good; not death but life; not illusion but reality" (HRK, p. 16). The burden of Henderson's grief, on the



other hand, attests to the fact that he has such imagination in abundance.

After leaving Lily, Henderson drives to Banyules, and in a marine station there he is confronted with a vision of death he also rejects. Pressing his head against the glass of an aquarium, he looks in at an octopus.

. . . the creature seemed also to look at me and press its soft head to the glass, flat, and the flesh becoming pale and granular--blanched, speckled. The eyes spoke to me coldly. But even more speaking, even more cold, was the soft head with its speckles, and the Brownian motion of those speckles, a cosmic coldness in which I felt I was dying. The tentacles throbbed and motioned through the glass, the bubbles sped upward, and I thought, "This is my last day. Death is giving me notice" (HRK, p. 19).

The repulsion and feelings of dread (angst) Henderson experiences in his encounter with this image of death immediately intensify the sense of separation from true being, and imply a longing for authenticity and for some identification of the source of his sense of alienated-dislocation in the world.

The dread evoked by the thought of death's giving him notice causes Henderson to devote himself intensely to life. It is to be noted that the savage exuberance with which Henderson attempts to live does not, ontologically, "distance" him as a human being from the compulsions or feelings of the reader, regardless of how disparate the life styles between persona and reader may be. Both are confronted in their respective selves with the universal

inevitability of mortality and with the question of whether or not to make a commitment to affirm their respective consciousnesses through effort and action. One perceives at this juncture both the positive and the negative possibilities. The way to authentic being necessitates both commitment and courage in the face of the universal unknown. Authenticity promises the potentiality of a release of anxiety and ontological guilt through a heightened present-moment-awareness. The capacity for self-awareness, in other words, increases the range of consciousness and, therefore, greatly enlarges the range of possibilities of one's transcending the immediate aspects of one's situation. Ultimately, choosing to affirm one's own being creates the values of life. The individual being, on the other hand, who surrenders self-awareness as a protection against reality must be prepared to suffer the neurotic consequences of forfeiting his own authentic self.

Following his vision of death in the Banyules marine station, Henderson rejects his suicide threats and commits himself to life. Everything he undertakes--including the pig raising--he does with a fierce energy that suggests a kind of desperation, although he appears to feel in-the-moment no desperation in his various activities. Every life-seizing gesture continues, however, to end in destruction and to cause Henderson additional frustration. The pigs, for example, seem to warn him of his alienation

from life, as he continually recalls Daniel's admonishment to King Nebuchadnezzar, "They shall drive thee from among men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field" (HRK, p. 21). While Henderson's ponderous body may, from an external viewpoint, make his aloneness seem comical, it calls up a different feeling in the reader who is ontologically-focused. Given the sense of alienation running through the contemporary world, the contemporary reader tends to regard Henderson's isolation as significant and particularly poignant. The crossroads incident which Henderson recalls from the war provides an example of such feelings in a contemporary human being. After reporting that he has crabs, Henderson is stripped, soaped, and shaved by four Army medics, who leave him naked, hairless, and standing in the middle of a crossroads near the water-front at Salerno.

They ran away and left me bald and shivering, ugly, naked, prickling between the legs and under the arms, raging, laughing, and swearing revenge. These are the things a man never forgets and afterward truly values. That beautiful sky, and the itch of the razors; and the Mediterranean, which is the cradle of mankind; the towering softness of the air; the sinking softness of the water, where Ulysses got lost, where he, too, was naked as the sirens sang (HRK, p. 22).

Humiliating as the experience of being publicly naked may be, it is, significantly, something which Henderson "never forgets and afterward truly values." Ontologically, the experience suggests that up to this point Henderson has

been contained in the sole realm of his enormous body. His feeling of suicide-potentiality, referred to earlier, indicates that he regards himself primarily as a material substance. His rejection of the possibility of suicide, together with the subsequent actions through which he devotes himself even more intensely to life, suggests that he has undergone a degree of change in attitude toward the self. Henderson does not, at this point, seem fully aware of the necessity of being able to regard himself (and to be regarded by others) imaginatively as a being, a source of will to action, not as a mere corporeal presence. A shift in attitude, nevertheless, has to a degree begun to take place by the point of his recollection of the Salerno incident.

To an extent all human beings are, as is Henderson, subject to the problem of regarding themselves merely as a corporeal presence just by virtue of the fact that they are human. Much as one may wish to be regarded as a person, the fact remains of the existence of a body which is enough of a psychological and physiological obstacle to be regarded as an object. This fundamental human state of existence may often cause one to feel estranged from one's self as well as from others. Human beings are distanced psychologically and physiologically from themselves and from others because to be is to be within a body. One's interior is, therefore, distanced from the world outside

consciousness and from the interior of others. The body is the transit between the two realms of the interior and the exterior. In The Barbarian Within, Walter J. Ong addresses himself to Heidegger's treatment of this perplexing form of human distancing.

As Heidegger has well explained, the human self ex-ists. It does not merely in-sist but rather seeks to spread out, to bring the dead, dull outside world within the circle of its own luminosity. But the body, the very organ through which the self becomes aware of its existence, stands in the way, for it itself, despite its intimate connection with the self, it is in a sense exterior, so that everything which comes into the soul through its mediation is invested with exteriority. There are other human selves, but, since the bodily senses mediate my contact with them, my knowledge of them remains radically an exterior knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

Exteriority is, therefore, a universal attribute of being human. One may, furthermore, at one time or another have exteriority for himself as well as for others. Such exteriority enables any individual under given circumstances to feel as Henderson feels, that is, dislocated, frustrated, and in a condition of grief.

Even after he has divorced his first wife and married Lily, Henderson still seems to feel naked and alone in the world. In addition to the significant physical pains which he suffers from dental work, fights, and accidents, he finds himself continually and increasingly tormented by the voice which cries "I want."

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4. Walter J. Ong, The Barbarian Within (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1962), pp. 250-251.

. . . there was a disturbance in my heart, a voice that spoke there and said, I want, I want, I want! It happened every afternoon, and when I tried to suppress it it got even stronger. It only said one thing, I want, I want!

And I would ask, "What do you want?"

But this was all it would ever tell me. It never said a thing except I want, I want, I want! (HRK, p. 24).

Henderson tries every kind of cure he can think of, at the same time realizing that ". . . in an age of madness, to expect to be untouched by madness is a form of madness. But the pursuit of sanity can be a form of madness, too" (HRK, p. 25). In his particular feelings of "madness," Henderson pursues whatever remedy occurs to him as a possible means of bringing about a cessation of the constant cry of his inner voice. He attempts, for example, to ease the feelings of strangulation in his spirit by learning to play his father's violin. He hopes, at this moment, also to make spiritual contact with a man whose life was one of quiet order and whose beard was "like a protest that gushed from his very soul" (HRK, p. 25).

Down in the basement of the house, I worked very hard as I do at everything. I had felt I was pursuing my father's spirit, whispering, "Oh, Father, Pa. Do you recognize the sounds? This is me, Gene, on your violin, trying to reach you." For it so happens that I've never been able to convince myself the dead are utterly dead. I admire rational people and envy their clear heads, but what's the use of kidding? I played in the basement to my father and my mother, and when I learned a few pieces I would whisper, "Ma, this is 'Humoreque' for you." Or, "Pa, listen-- 'Meditation' from Thäis." I played with dedication,

with feeling, with longing, love--played to the point of emotional collapse. Also down there in my studio I sang as I played, "Rispondi! Anima bella" (Mozart). "He was despised and rejected, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Handel). Clutching the neck of the little instrument as if there were strangulation in my heart . . . (HRK, p. 30).

The violin-playing and the singing, however, fail to relieve the frustrating feeling that he is only another one of countless displaced and frustrated persons without a function in life.

Within the existential-ontological perspective Henderson's attempts to eliminate his feelings of grief through learning to play his father's violin have two significant implications regarding the state of his consciousness in-the-moment. The first of these is that from an existential point of view Henderson is unable, in-the-moment, to commit himself fully to the present and to the future. The past, for this reason, cannot come fully alive for him; it cannot provide him with any solace as long as he is unsure as to what really matters to him in the future. Henderson's feelings of hope as he undertakes each of his various activities and his intense commitment to those activities in the fervent anticipation that any one of them might relieve his suffering are thereby doomed from the onset. His commitment to overcome his anxieties and painful grief in the present, however, is a crucial step toward realization of his authentic being. The problem,

in-the-moment, for Henderson seems to be housed in his assumption that the answer to his suffering resides in some usual or automatic doctrine of the past or of historical progress. By attempting to recreate and take refuge in the past, Henderson is essentially evading the immediate anxieties of the present. From the ontological perspective, no doctrine of the past or any historical force can carry Henderson automatically through the present. His ultimate dilemma in pursuing his father's spirit through learning to play the violin is that he cannot achieve a genuine state of being (human) through such historical identification and that the effort itself is inevitably capable of increasing his present-moment suffering and pain.

Ontologically, the reader may be aware of the uselessness of Henderson's efforts in-the-moment, while at the same time he may experience the anticipation that the persona does in the first encounter with each new activity. The existential-ontologically focused reader, rejecting historical doctrine, also rejects its most common form of historical determinism in contemporary society, the faith in automatic technical progress. What limits Henderson's awareness at this point is his feeling that it is possible to learn not only facts from another generation but more importantly, how to be. Ontologically, this is an impossibility.



Whatever the one generation may learn from the other, that which is genuinely human no generation learns from the foregoing. . . . Thus no generation has learned from another to love, no generation begins at any other point than at the beginning, no generation has a shorter task assigned to it than had the previous generation. . . . In this respect every generation begins primitively, has no different task from that of every previous generation, nor does it get further, except in so far as the preceding generation shirked its task and deluded itself.<sup>5</sup>

Henderson attempts to learn the apparent quietude and contentment of his father's existence through acting upon the external attributes of that existence. In so doing, Henderson makes of his own past existence an object that is outside of his "self."

The second important implication of Henderson's state of consciousness in-the-moment in which he undertakes learning to play his father's violin is that he believes, is self-convinced, that some form of "cure" for his "condition" is available in the external world. By learning to play the violin his father played, Henderson is pursuing a cure which is fundamentally a mechanistic approach external to his being. The only way in which playing the violin can have any curative effects for him resides in the context of Henderson's becoming aware of his true being in existence. Only through such a context can the playing of the instrument have any effect on him or in

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5. Sören Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, trans. by Walter Lowrie (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1954), p. 130.

any way have true reality for him. Without such a context, Henderson may as well simply read about violin-playing.

The point is of special importance because Henderson's problem, as well as that of the contemporary reader, is the tendency to talk about the self in terms of a mechanism, a tendency born out of twentieth-century Western culture which emphasizes methodology and technique. The result, however, for both Henderson and the reader is that in viewing the self as a mechanism--something which can be operated and systematically, objectively run like an automobile--one avoids confronting one's own existence. Thus, the adage of being "objective" about one's self is a method of repressing ontological awareness. The fact that Henderson can (is willing to and does) learn to play his father's violin is, therefore, a manifestation of his truncated awareness and loss of sense of being. As long as he or the reader think of the self as a mechanism, he is essentially structuring his respective existence rather than providing any cure in consciousness. Henderson's search for a cure is, in the final account, a clear reflection of his problem. The idea of "cure," that is, to live as long as possible and as satisfactorily adjusted as possible, is itself a denial of dasein, of the particular reader or persona's being. To be "cured" by means of adjusting is to adhere to a mechanistic doctrine or to the methodologies that fit the external world or culture. As

mentioned above, it is difficult to extract the self from mechanistic tendencies while the self "lives" in a culture that promotes living one's life in a controlled, well-managed way. To do so, however, is to confine and limit one's own world to a state which is only a mirror image, identical to the world of the culture. The violin-playing, therefore, has no curative effect because it requires one to forfeit one's own freedom of being-in-the-world. To gain release from conflict or anxiety is to be "cured" by giving up being. Since anxiety comes only with freedom of choice in the authentic self, such anxiety dissolves when one gives up or surrenders one's potentia--possibilities of being authentic. The violin-playing does not end Henderson's frustration because in some level of his consciousness he is committed to becoming, to an ongoing orientation toward the fulfillment of his existence as dasein or being-in-the-world.

In the initial moments of Henderson's continuous process of becoming, one perceives him to be in direct opposition to the reality that reveals itself to him as suffering, loneliness, and madness. He goes on, however, with the intention that human life can, in some manner, be made to be meaningful and that, given the right code or information set, the spirit can be satisfied. Henderson perceives himself to be incapable of hiding from reality and in fact, as he argues to Lily, he feels he is "on

damned good terms with reality" (HRK, p. 36). Reality, however, provides him with no fulfillment of his spiritual needs. Henderson's frustration is related, at this point of his becoming, to his feelings of pride. His sense of pride leads him into his pig-raising career just as it motivates him into committing an "offense" against his daughter, Ricey, by parting her from the abandoned black child she finds and brings home to raise. Seeing the despair in his daughter's eyes, Henderson says to her, "Sweetheart, your daddy did what any other daddy would do" (HRK, p. 37). Ontologically viewed, Henderson is still justifying his actions in terms of the external world. He does not, in-the-moment, have a full awareness of the fact that he is helping to displace another person in the world and that Ricey's belief that she is the baby's mother is a corollary to his own existential need to love man.

Bound home after leaving the unconsolable Ricey with an aunt in Providence, Henderson sits alone playing solitaire. By the time he leaves the train, he has worked himself into such a state of nervous exhaustion that he has to be carried off and placed on a bench in the station, swearing all the while, "There is a curse on this land. There is something bad going on. Something is wrong. There is a curse on this land!" (HRK, p. 38). Again, Henderson perceives his personal lack of spiritual fulfillment in terms of an external American culture. As he has

earlier commented, "America is so big, and everybody is working, making, digging, bulldozing, trucking, loading, and so on, and I guess the sufferers suffer at the same rate. Everybody wanting to pull together" (HRK, p. 25). Ontologically viewed, the busy, preoccupied, distracted "others" (everybody) are reflections of a lack of authenticity in Henderson's own state of being.

The roots of Henderson's grief lie in the sense of exteriority which he and other selves in the world feel. Henderson wants to be able to regard himself as a complete person, that is, as content in his inner world. His longing for authenticity is, however, in-the-moment ambiguous since he is confusing his real being with a state of being or feeling fulfilled, a condition in which the cry of "I want" will cease. Given such a self-perspective, Henderson's vision of fulfillment is impossible to achieve since he is imagining himself as outside of his body, or outside of existence, in a state of pure essence. For Henderson to become fulfilled is impossible as long as he continues to adhere to a sense of self in which his essence and his presence are separate. Henderson's sense of alienation is initiated as well as perpetuated by the alienated perspective from which he regards himself and feels himself to be regarded by others.

Again, what needs to be transformed, at this point in the novel, is Henderson's false mode of imaginative

vision. The existential-ontologically-focused reader holds the realization of such a transformation to be possible. The realization is possible because it is not the existence of one's literal (physical and psychological) body which alienates the self from itself and from others, but, rather, one's idea of that body. As soon as one begins to search for the real person, the being-in-the-process-of-becoming, behind the psychological and physiological impediments of appearance, the obstructiveness becomes irrelevant.

The actual evolution of Henderson's transformation of imaginative vision begins with his purchase of a one-way ticket to Africa. The fact that he buys a one-way ticket is in itself indicative of his need to commit himself wholly to the immediate present. Such a commitment, as noted earlier, is essential to the development of a heightened awareness of self as being in the process of becoming. The Henderson who leaves Idlewild Airport departs with a potentiality for developing a new visionary essence, a new Henderson. One is convinced of Henderson's commitment and potentia through his ability to take action on his verbal admonishment to himself to "put forth effort" and to seize the moment.

So for God's sake make a move, Henderson, put forth effort. You, too, will die of this pestilence. Death will annihilate you and nothing will remain, and there will be nothing left but junk. Because nothing will have been and so nothing will be left.

While something still is--now! For the sake of all,  
get out (HRK, p. 40).

Ontologically, the fact that Henderson includes in his decision a concern for "all" (the others) is more important as a further index of his potentiality for transformation than it is of merely a superficial desire to escape the pressures of an external world. Henderson's concern may or may not be, in other words, the beginning of a capacity for transcending the immediate situation because of his capacity for sorge--that is for "care" or, more accurately, for understanding his being and taking responsibility for it. (It should be noted here that the Heideggerian term, Sorge, is often used in the form of Fursorge, meaning "care for," "concerned for the welfare of.")

As soon as the plane is airborne, Henderson has for a brief time a sensation of euphoria and release as though he were an "airborne seed." There appears to be, in other words, a momentary level of awareness in which he senses the possibility of a growth toward a new self. The sensation, however, is still linked to a faith in technology, to Henderson's belief that modern society's technological advancements and progress should ease the struggles of the individual. Sitting above the clouds at a height of three miles, Henderson states:

. . . I dreamed down at the clouds, and thought  
that when I was a kid I had dreamed up at them,  
and having dreamed at the clouds from both sides  
as no other generation of men has done, one should

be able to accept his death very easily. However, we made safe landings every time (HRK, p. 42).

Henderson's break with the external world, with civilization and all of the "others" in his existence, is not complete so long as he merely accompanies his honeymooning friends who have formed the photographic expedition he joined. Not sure as to how to go directly to Africa by himself, Henderson needed other selves at the time. Among other avocations and pursuits, Henderson, however, has no use for photography--another version of reality--for, more significantly, he has an existential-ontological need to confront his "self." He, therefore, breaks away from his friends. Promising him a jeep in return for his services, Henderson convinces the native guide, Romilayu, to take him to places "off the beaten track," and so his journey begins into the primitive, isolated villages of the interior of Africa. Henderson hopes to discover some cure to satiate the voice that cries inside him. His long trek into the heart of Africa begins with a kind of purification brought on by an external geography that has for him certain anthropological and pre-Adamic connotation.

I got clean away from everything, and we came into a region like a floor surrounded by mountains. It was hot, clear, and arid and after several days we saw no human footprints. Nor were there many plants; for that matter there was not much of anything here; it was all simplified and splendid, and I felt I was entering the past--the real past, no history or junk like that. The prehuman past. And I believed that there was something between the stones and me. The mountains were naked, and



often snakelike in their forms, without trees, and you could see the clouds being born on the slopes (HRK, p. 46).

Having trudged with his native guide through dry and barren land, en route to the village of the Arnewi, Henderson remembers shortly after they have arrived his feelings in the moment.

I was so sure that I had left the world. And who could blame me, after that trip across the mountain floor on which there was no footprint, the stars flaming like oranges, those multimillion tons of exploding gas looking so mild and fresh in the dark of the sky; and altogether, that freshness, you know, that is like autumn freshness when you go out of the house in the morning and find the flowers have waked in the frost piercing life? When I experienced this in the desert, night and morning, feeling everything to be so simplified, I was quite sure that I had gone clean out of the world . . . (HRK, pp. 52-53).

Searching for some essentials, for some thing or some idea that will help him to discover the roots of the poverty he feels in his spiritual self, Henderson is acutely attuned to the dramatically stark environment. Mistakenly, from the reader's viewpoint, he feels himself to be free of externals by virtue of being in a simplified environment. What is overlooked in the moment of Henderson's existence is the fact that man, as (human) being-in-the-world, does not have an environment per se but, rather, a world. Henderson's feelings of release, purification, and excitement are brought on by his identification of self with the "world around" him, the biological world, generally called "the environment." The world about one (Umwelt), the

natural world consisting of natural laws, cycles of sleep and wakefulness, of birth and death, and so on, is a "thrown world," one in which one finds oneself and to which one must by some means adjust. Henderson is, therefore, "adjusting" to an external idea of world. Such adjustment is, indeed, necessary for all human beings, but it is not to be regarded as the only "world" or mode of existence in the context of human self-awareness. Being convinced that he has "left the world," Henderson has, in the ontological perspective, never been more contained within it.

Entering the village of the Arnewi, Henderson reveals, again, his faith in the idea that one can reach a state of spiritual contentment through mechanisms, through the technology of the modern world, or through facts and information alone. To announce his arrival, Henderson, in a Godlike manner, sets a bush on fire with his cigarette lighter.

. . . without waiting for Romilayu's advice I took out the Austrian lighter with the dropping wick, spun the tiny wheel with my thumb, and immediately a bush went flaming, almost invisible in the strong sunlight. It roared; it made a brilliant manifestation; it stretched to its limits and became extinct in the sand. I was left holding the lighter with the wick coming out of my fist like a slender whisker. The kids were unanimously silent, they only looked, and I looked at them. That's what they call reality's dark dream? Then suddenly everyone scattered again, and the cows galloped. The embers of the bush had fallen to my boots (HRK, p. 48).

The implications of the fact that the bush burns to a spot of ashes, unlike the one on Mount Sinai, appear to be lost on Henderson in the moment. The reader, however, views the incident as characteristic of Henderson's tendency to hold on to a number of mistaken assumptions about the nature of his existence in the world. His pride in his country's technology and in his own ingenuity block his perception of real being.

The human desire for acceptability in front of one's self and others is, from the ontological perspective, rooted in one's sense of the complete transparency of one's real being.. And everyone, more or less, tries to obtain this absolute transparency by spurious means, by rejecting the opaqueness of being-in-a-body and attempting to live in a state of pure essence. The paradox is that only through the acceptance of and submission to the limitations of existence can one begin to see himself and others as transparent, as acceptable beings. Henderson seems to feel that his well-intended actions are immediately known to be well-intended by the others with whom he attempts to communicate. He is, in-the-moment, perceiving himself to be Godlike, or capable of pure essence. Such an idea of "self" causes him to be distanced from himself and from others. Henderson is confusing his real being with being or feeling omnipotent in the face of a group of others--the Arnewi villagers--who lack technological sophistication.

From such a point of view, Henderson's vision of real being is impossible to achieve, since he is imagining himself outside his body, or outside existence, in a state of pure essence possible only for angels. At this point in the novel, there is no authentic union between Henderson's sense of being in the natural world and Henderson's spiritual sense of self.

The persona's first major struggle to find meaning and continuity in life occurs among the Arnewi. Appropriate to their natural state of existence, the Arnewi are cattle raisers. When Henderson enters their village, he finds them in tears and sadness, helplessly wringing their hands, because their water supply has been contaminated by the mysterious appearance of a multitude of "unholy" frogs. Since their dying cattle are not only sacred, but also considered to be members of their families, their grief is considerable. Romilayu explains the situation to Henderson:

"Dem cry for dead cow," he said. And he explained the thing very clearly, that they were mourning for cattle which had died in the drought, and that they took responsibility of the drought upon themsevles--the gods were offended, or something like that; a curse was mentioned. Anyway, as we were strangers they were obliged to come forward and confess everything to us, and ask whether we knew the reason for their trouble (HRK, pp. 50-51).

From the existential-ontological perspective, there are two points that are, in Romilayu's account of the situation, of particular significance. First, the statement that "a curse was mentioned" is meaningful. The

nature of the Arnewi curse is unknown but, given an acceptance of a universal ground-of-being, it unites Henderson with his fellow man, with mankind. This unity is implied since the curse is reminiscent of Henderson's earlier exclamation that there is a "curse on the land," a feeling he voiced while lying drunk on a bench in the Danbury train station. Ontologically, one can regard the two curses as the same, that is, although one does not know the specific referent of either, they are both expressions of man's universal susceptibility to suffering and despair. The grief Henderson experiences in Danbury may be perceived as rooted in man's essential nature, in his beingness, just as is the grief of the Arnewi villagers. Bellow emphasizes the universal ground of being, of mankind's susceptibility to suffer grief, when Itelo, Prince of the Arnewi, and Henderson are examining the cistern. When they have finished their inspection, Henderson says: "As we turned away I felt as though that cistern of problem water with its algae and its frogs had entered me, occupying a square space in my interior, and sloshing around as I moved" (HRK, p. 61).

The second point is that the Arnewi natives, according to Henderson, "were obliged to come forward and confess everything to us, and ask whether we knew the reason for their trouble." Although Henderson's interpretation of what is happening in-the-moment does not imply

any particular insight into himself, the reader's perception is that an insight of his need to be is beginning to emerge in Henderson's attitude toward himself. His choice of the words, "obliged to come forward" and "confess," indicate a precondition or potentiality for realizing himself as universally connected to other persons in the world who are not necessarily similar in their states of being to himself. One senses in the word choice, an emerging sense of humility that from an external viewpoint, would seem in-the-moment contradictory to Henderson's pride and sense of omnipotence in the face of any situation with which he is confronted. Henderson, in other words, has at this point the possibility of being in a Mitwelt mode of world. Heidegger's term refers to the "with-world," literally, the state of one's existence in the world of one's own kind, the world of one's fellow men. Henderson in-the-moment is outside of this mode of world but, again, is viewed as being susceptible to entering it within his own being. This is not to suggest that he is potentially capable of being influenced by others or that he will conform to any collective mind. Rather, the reader feels that Henderson's word choice indicates a possible beginning realization that the meaning of others in the world is partly determined by one's own relationship to them.

One's sense of Henderson's potential for developing an increased awareness of his being is also apparent in one

of the first announcements he makes to the Arnewi, that "I am really on a kind of quest" (HRK, p. 65). Ontologically, this statement has no exterior significance beyond the fact that Henderson is simply trying to discover a remedy for the voice that cries "I want." The fact that he is making an effort to resolve his inner struggling by means of committing himself to the adventurous journey through Africa is one index of beginning consciousness. As Henderson comes to grips with Prince Itelo in a wrestling match intended to introduce strangers to the tribe, Henderson thinks at the time "I do remember well the hour which burst my spirit's sleep" (HRK, p. 67). The thought is further affirmation of his emerging identification of self just as it is indicative of his beginning consciousness.

Among the Arnewi, Henderson meets Queen Willatale, who has achieved the high distinction of being named "woman o' Bittahness." When he exclaims that she hardly looks bitter in all her evident poise and comfort, with her well-cared for massive body, Itelo explains: "'Oh, happy! Yes, happy--bittah. Most bittah,' . . . A Bittah was a person of real substance. You couldn't be any higher or better. . . . She had risen above ordinary human limitations and did whatever she liked because of her proven superiority in all departments" (HRK, p. 75).

Henderson's beginning of consciousness in relation to his meeting Willatale is precipitated by the external

fact of his being highly impressed by her presence and external appearance and by what he intuitively felt to be her spiritual essence. There is a lavish euphoria of self-generosity in Henderson's description of the Arnewi Queen.

To me she was typical of a certain class of elderly lady. . . . Good nature emanated from her; it seemed to puff out on her breath as she sat smiling with many small tremors of benevolence and congratulation and welcome. Itelo indicated that I should give the old woman a hand, and I was astonished when she took it and buried it between her breasts. . . . there was the calm pulsation of her heart participating in the introduction. This was as regular as the rotation of the earth . . . my mouth came open and my eyes grew fixed as if I were touching the secrets of life; but I couldn't keep my hand there forever, and I came to myself and drew it out. Then I returned the courtesy, I held her hand on my chest and said, "Me Henderson. Henderson." The whole court applauded to see how fast I caught on. So I thought, "Hurray for me!" and drew an endless breath into my lungs. . . . The queen expressed stability in every part of her body (HRK, pp. 71-72).

The symbol of Willatale as an archetypal earth mother is obvious, but what is of immediate-moment significance is the fact that Henderson draws into his lungs an "endless breath" that ontologically unites him with all other human beings, with mankind. Confronted by his own lack of feeling any stability or sense of self during his encounter with Willatale, Henderson is compelled merely to review his own life before attempting to tell the Arnewi who he is:

Who--who was I? A millionaire wanderer and wayfarer. A brutal and violent man driven into the world. A man who fled his own country, settled by his forefathers. A fellow whose heart said, I want, I want. Who played the violin in despair, seeking the voice of angels. Who had to burst



the spirit's sleep, or else. So what could I tell this old queen in a lion skin and raincoat. . . . I said to myself, "You must answer the woman, Henderson. She is waiting. But how?" And the process started over again. Once more it was who are you? And I had to confess that I didn't know where to begin (HRK, pp. 76-77).

Henderson's inability to come up with a satisfactory answer to the question of who he is suggests once again that his being is in the process of becoming. He is unable to settle on any idea or concept of himself that would contain what he is as being in the world. The fact that he does not even "know where to begin" is indicative of his growing toward a new state of mind. Henderson is incapable in-the-moment of referring to himself in terms other than the past tense. His question, "Who was I?" reflects a being in process. Henderson is not in total stasis. He refrains from limiting his world and sense of self by describing that self in terms of the present tense. He does not ask, "Who am I?" for to do so would encourage a response dependent upon a series of self-labels. He seems to sense the futility of labeling himself in terms of his individual history. To use self-descriptors in reference to the self is to remain chained to one's own past. Any self-labeling for Henderson would be a deterrent to his growth; it would, furthermore, be an indication that his "self" had ceased to exist.

Another indication of Henderson's growth toward a new state of mind is that for the first time he is able to

tell someone about the voice that cries inside him. The revelation of self to another is Henderson's first attempt to understand his own being through its relation to that of another being in the world. He becomes convinced that Willatale can show him the mysteries of life and help him to determine precisely what it is that his inner voice wants.

I believed the queen could straighten me out if she wanted to, as if, any minute now, she might open her hand and show me the thing, the source, the germ--the cipher. The mystery, you know. I was absolutely convinced she must have it. . . . Look how happy she was, grinning with her flat nose and gap teeth, the mother-of-pearl eye and the good eye, and look at her white head! It comforted me just to see her, and I felt that I might learn to be sustained too if I followed her example. And altogether I felt my hour of liberation was drawing near when the sleep of the spirit was liable to burst (HRK, p. 79).

Although Henderson reaches toward understanding his real being by relating the predicament of his existence to Willatale, he is at the same time still convinced that an external cure is possible. With an unflagging faith in contemporary technology and the power of knowledge and ideas, Henderson believes the answer to his anguish cannot be revealed only by an external personality, but also that it will come in the form of a "thing" (object) or an idea. In-the-moment, Henderson's personal selfhood is still oriented toward the external world. He is en route to discovering real being through his commitment to act and his now present ability to relate his inner suffering to

another self. He is not, however, free of his concept of himself at the time he meets Willatale. He is still locked into his own version of self.

Being a woman of "Bittahness," Queen Willatale understands that Henderson "has never been at home in life" (HRK, p. 84), and that he is in many respects still a child. Whereas the "others" in Henderson's world are in limited stages of being and, therefore, unable to help him, Willatale, a woman of real being, is able to perceive the roots of Henderson's longings.

"Grun-tu-molani," the old queen said. [Itelo translates] "Say, you want to live. Grun-tu-molani. Man want to live." "Yes, yes, yes! Molani. Me molani. She sees that? God will reward her, tell her, for saying it to me. I'll reward her myself. I'll annihilate and blast those frogs clear out of that cistern. . . . Not only molani for myself, but for everybody. I could not bear how sad things have become in the world and so I set out because of this molani. Grun-tu-molani, old lady--old queen. Grun-tu-molani, everybody!" I raised my helmet to all the family and members of the court. "Grun-tu-molani. God does not shoot dice with our souls, and therefore grun-tu-molani" (HRK, p. 85).

In a moment of illumination, Henderson is overcome with the discovery of someone who can understand him. The moment of illumination is significant in that it increases in Henderson a level-of-awareness that he is not completely isolated in or alienated from the world of others. That he translates the awareness in terms of the fact that someone in the external world is capable of understanding him indicates he is still locked into his own selfhood. That

is, he is still living his life according to his personal version of reality.

In contrast to Henderson, who is susceptible to feeling guilty, and who is unable to seize the here-and-now, Queen Willatale manifests reality. She has, for example, paid the cost of beauty. Her massive body indicates that she is not concerned with external appearances or with versions of an exterior-world account of what is or is not of human value. Her "stability" is linked to her capacity to live in the presence of death. Her defective eye, "with a cataract, blueish white" (HRK, p. 72), her white head and attire--the skin of a lion--bear testimony to the fact that she is at peace with death, not as an idea, but as reality. Henderson, on the other hand, believes that he accepts reality. As mentioned earlier, he feels he is on "damned good terms" with it. Begging for reality, he asks in rebuttal of T. S. Eliot, ". . . humankind cannot stand too much reality. But how much unreality can it stand?" (HRK, p. 105). In-the-moment, however, Henderson deceives himself. The reality he knows is his reality, a version, an ideal construct. He believes "It's you who makes the world what it is. Reality is you" (HRK, p. 123). His journey from America to Africa is "mental travel" and the Arnewi are his savages. Henderson's sense of illumination in-the-moment he knows (realizes that) another being can understand him is, therefore, only a

partial step toward authentic being. He still enjoys putting his personal stamp on the world too much to know himself truly as a being in the process of becoming.

Reality, from Bellow's point of view in the novel, is "the old bitch"--a female figure such as Willatale. Her reality is joyful, for as a woman of substance she is, in spite of any given personal sorrows and her authentic death-awareness, in possession of an amor fati which Henderson does not yet have. "There was no anxious care in her, and she was sustained. Why, nothing bad happened! On the contrary, it all seemed good" (HRK, p. 79). Emerging from the lines of the novel is the feeling that Henderson would like to imitate Willatale, to stop his striving and reach a state of contented being. Yet given his fears and grief, and particularly his tendency to emphasize his life through his own version of reality, it is impossible for Henderson to achieve transformation. As long as Henderson needs to search for his identity, he is still in the process of becoming, in the sense that he is dependent upon his view of world for that transformation.

With joyous gratitude for the idea of "grun-to-molani," Henderson, in his moment of illumination, couples his desire to live with the necessity to eliminate the frogs from the Arnewi's cistern. He is now eager to begin what he considers to be his personal project. Feeling certain that he can help the villagers, he says to Itelo:

"'Itelo, you leave this to me,' and [I] drew in a sharp breath between my teeth, feeling that I had it in me to be the doom of those frogs. . . . I realized that I would never rest until I had dealt with these creatures and lifted the plague" (HRK, p. 61). Permitting Henderson to do as he pleases, Prince Itelo merely cautions him, "Mr. Henderson. . . . Do not be carry away." To which Henderson replies, "Ha, ha, Prince--pardon me, but this is where you happen to be wrong. If I don't get carried away I never accomplish anything" (HRK, p. 88). The fact that Henderson must be "carried away" in order to accomplish something is an additional indication that he is not, like Willitale, in a state of being that is self-sustaining. Henderson, in direct contrast, is in an ontological state of anxious care which keeps him preoccupied and busy, yet essentially distanced from real being. To produce, to accomplish anything he must be transported from himself and away from the awareness of the voice crying inside of him.

In Henderson's perception the cure and solution to the problem of ridding the Arnewi cistern of the frogs is to be discovered through a logical explanation of technical knowledge and practical past experience. Using his wartime training, he rigs a home-made bomb. Perceiving himself as a practical man, this is a job he can do and he sets about it with an almost childish enthusiasm. Employing his American ingenuity, he uses his shoelace as a fuse, lighter

fluid on the fuse, powder from his bullets, and a flash-light case for the shell. At the time he is at work on the bomb, Henderson delights in anticipating the annihilation of the frogs.

"Poor little bastards," was what I said, but in actual fact I was gloating--yuck-yuck-yuck! My heart was already fattening in anticipation of their death. We hate death, we fear death, but when you get right down to cases, there's nothing like it. I was sorry for the cows, yes and on the humane side I was fine. I checked out one hundred per cent. But I still hungered to let fall the ultimate violence on these creatures in the cistern (HRK, p. 89).

Here, again, Henderson believes that he accepts reality, but the reality he loves is his version. There is for Henderson nothing like death as long as he dispenses it: death under his personal control. In-the-moment, Henderson's laughing and singing, his sensations of joy and euphoria arise not from a true sense of being, but, rather, from feelings of self-pride and an ego emphasis in his selfhood that allows him to feel completely in control of the situation, of the external world. Adhering to an ideal construction of the real nature of death, Henderson continues to deceive himself. Significantly, he also feels that he is fine on the "humane side." He sees himself as an achiever, as a rational person capable of a humane act. The perception, however, is from a superior vantage point in Henderson's view of himself. There is no authentic care, no grasping of the moment as an opportunity to relate

to others in the world. Instead, Henderson anticipates the gratitude of the Arnewi. He relishes the notion of himself as omnipotent. What he actually seeks from the Arnewi in-the-moment is not relatedness, but their love for and gratitude toward him.

. . . my idea was that when I had performed my great deed against the frogs, then the Arnewi would take me to their hearts. Already I had won Itelo, and the queen had a lot of affection for me, and Mtalba wanted to marry me, and so what was left was only to prove (and the opportunity was made to order; it couldn't have suited my capacities better) that I was deserving (HRK, p. 98).

Henderson's need to be in-the-moment is stronger than at any preceding point in the novel. His awareness of that need, however, is obscured by his preoccupied state of mind. He wants desperately to feel "deserving" in his own sense of self. Yet he still perceives the release of his sense of being undeserving to be housed in a formula or approach that is external to himself. He believes that if the Arnewi perceive him as worthy of merit, then he too, will be able to feel that he is such a person. The ego emphasis, however, holds him in an arrested state of awareness. Still attempting to manipulate the exterior world, he perceives the "opportunity" as "suiting" his capacities. The world, for him, still adjusts itself to him. Reality was what Henderson says he wants, but, it does not appear to be what he really wants. Instead, one sees him as wanting reality to fulfill his personal hope



that "God does not shoot dice with our souls. . . ."

Henderson, in-the-moment, seeks to affirm the meaningfulness of his own sense of selfhood. He appears to believe that through his practical knowledge and rational efforts he can hold his own being intact and death at bay.

. . . My spirit was not sleeping then, I can tell you, but was saying Oh ho, ho, ho, ho, ho, ho!

Gradually the light changed, as it was bound to do, but at least I had seen it again, like the fringe of the Nirvana, and I let it go without a struggle, hoping it would come again before another fifty years had passed. As otherwise I would be condemned to die a mere old rioter or dumpsock with three million dollars, a slave to lowgrade fear and turbulence.

So now when I turned my thoughts to the relief of the Arnewi, I was a different person, or thought I was. I had passed through something, a vital experience (HRK, p. 102).

Relying solely on his stupendous sense of his own technical abilities, Henderson, in essence, wills the annihilation of the frogs and feels as though he is the only one capable of accomplishing the feat. His efforts, however, result in an indiscriminate destruction. The explosion destroys the cistern as well as the frogs, and all the water escapes.

Overcome with feelings of grief and frustration, Henderson cannot understand his continual failure to achieve something of value in the external world. "Why for once, just once!" he mourns, "couldn't I get my heart's desire? I have to be doomed always to bungle" (HRK, p. 111). In-the-moment of anguish, the "heart's desire" is

more important than the thirsty Arnewians. One is reminded of the destructive ego emphasis of Goethe's Faust striving to make the world after his image at the cost of the lives of others. Henderson weeps for himself. There is, in-the-moment, no sense of authentic interrelationship with other human beings in the world. Henderson's state of being in-the-world is arrested not because of a failed technical effort, but because of a lack of authentic being and his inability to perceive the interrelatedness of his own being with that of others in the world.

One may speculate, at this point in the novel, that Bellow feels that the poverty of man's essential being, his spiritual self, is not to be relieved through scientific progress or technological achievement. Within the realm of the self as a being in-the-world, progress is not the best product or result of one's efforts. There is no ontological meaning in progress outside of the existence of an individual. Furthermore, Bellow seems to suggest that man in prideful manipulation of the objective or measurable is likely to be persuaded of omnipotent abilities that he does not possess. Wilful, blind misapprehension of one's limited potentialities can drive one, in spite of good intentions, to destroy the value of life itself. Bellow is saying, in other words, that man is not all-powerful, and for him to mistake his human nature as being such can only result in a disillusioning and despairing sickness of the

heart. Whenever Bellow's persona calls upon the devices and formulas of "civilized" man, he stumbles into the same frustrating dead ends that characterized his experiences and life in America prior to the flight to Africa.

From the existential-ontological point of view, Bellow, furthermore, makes a fundamental statement through Henderson's battle with the frogs. In-the-moment of preparing the bomb, and later of experiencing the explosion, Henderson undergoes an existential experience that is the first major stage in the development of his authentic state of being in-the-world. The symbology of the novel supports the beginning transformation in Henderson's state of being. The plague of frogs may be viewed as analogous, for example, to the curse Henderson feels to be his particular burden. Just as Henderson strives to purge his existence of the frustrating, contaminating voice that cries within, "I want," he strives to get rid of the Arnewi frogs. The frogs and the cries-from-within may both, however, be viewed as representative of a condition of life and both belong where they are in existence. Bellow points to the issue when Henderson notices how well-suited the frogs are to their environment: "There really was a vast number of these creatures woggling and crowding, stroking along with the water slipping over their backs and their mottles, as if they owned the medium" (HRK, pp. 59-60). And again: "There in their home medium were the creatures, the

polliwogs with fat heads and skinny tails and their budding little scratchers, and the mature animals . . ." (HRK, p. 107). Symbolically, one may perceive the frogs as representative of the elements in man that are the sources of imagination, of intuition, of his quests for extending himself, of his dreams, desires, memories, despairs, and frustrations. What is, however, of immediate importance is the fact that the frogs' presence causes fear in the Arnewi and that in some extension of his being Henderson seems to sense his own fears in the presence of the frogs. His anxious anticipation of their destruction may be regarded as an exterior manifestation of his efforts to free himself of the destructive elements in his "personality" that hold him in an arrested state of becoming. What Henderson is beginning to learn is that man is ultimately defined by his human existence, a condition which includes his mortality. This illumination suggests the beginning of an existential discovery in Henderson, and his immediate reactions to the catastrophe that he has brought about testify to the point:

The explosion had blasted out the retaining wall at the front end. The big stone blocks had fallen and the yellow reservoir was emptying fast. "Oh! Hell!" I grabbed my head, immediately dizzy with the nausea of disaster, seeing the water spill like a regular mill race, with the remains of those frogs. "Hurry, hurry!" I started to yell. "Romilayu! Itelo! Oh, Judas priest, what's happening! Give a hand. Help, you guys, help!" I threw myself down against the escaping water and tried to breast it back and lift

the stones into place. The frogs charged into me like so many prunes and fell into my pants and into the open shoe, the lace gone. . . . It was a moment of horror. . . . Romilayu waded up beside me and did his best, but these blocks of stone were beyond our strength. . . . Anyway, the water was lost--lost! In a matter of minutes I saw (sickening!) the yellow mud of the bottom and the dead frogs settling there. . . . Under me the water of the cistern was turning to hot vapor and the sun was already beginning to corrupt the bodies of the frog dead (HRK, pp. 109-110).

The phrase, "dizzy with the nausea of disaster" is reminiscent of Sartre's description of man's discovery of his state of "absurdity" and the effects of such a realization on the individual life.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Henderson is "sickeningly" aware of the filth and corruption of the environment and of the dead frogs around him. Bellow's choice of the word "dizzy" suggests Kierkegaard's phrase, "the dizziness of freedom," which he uses to describe man's reaction to the responsibility that he inherits as a consequence of his discovery of freedom. If one is free, then one is responsible in his actions for himself and ultimately for the destiny of mankind. There are parallels in-the-moment, in Henderson's existence. He has, for example, the freedom to act upon his decision to destroy the frogs. His "dizziness," furthermore, can be regarded as a painful step toward an inner illumination and realization of his

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6. Jean Paul Sartre, "Response to Albert Camus," Les Temps Modernes, 9 (August, 1952), pp. 340-346.

responsibility to the others (Arnewi) in the state of being existent in-the-world.

Failing to lift up the blocks of stone, Henderson in his present-moment confusion is not yet capable of enough self-awareness to enact the role of Sisyphus. His inability to realize fully his own mortality as essential to his development of authentic being is born out by the fact that a certain phrase returns to his mind again and again, either in part or in its entirety: "I do remember well the hour that burst my spirit's sleep." The words can be viewed as indicative of Henderson's on-going development of self awareness and of his increasing degrees-of-freedom from bondage to an ideal notion of himself and to a version of exterior-world reality. That Bellow selects a line from Shelley's poem, "Revolt of Islam," as the phrase that returns to Henderson's thoughts in various moments of his existence is of particular significance. The choice indicates that Bellow, with Shelley, rejects adherence to any superficial mores of society or pretensions of generations past that deny one's essential being, a condition that includes one's own mortality. As Shelley writes in the "Revolt of Islam," "There is no danger to a man that knows/ What life and death is; there's not any law/ Exceeds his knowledge: neither is it lawful/ That he should stoop to any other law." Henderson recalls the phrase from the poem just as he earlier lost the phrase, "righteousness

first is not required," because he has not yet discovered "what life and death is" in terms of his own existence in the world and because he is unwilling to settle for submission into a passive state of non-being. The source of his human condition resides in that fact that he exists and has a need to be, that he is, as all other "selves" in the world, mortal. The fact that he is alive and existent in the world is not, however, the source of his curse; he, as unique being in the world, is his own source of particular grief and frustration. Not fully aware of "what life and death is," Henderson continues to insist upon illusions of an ideal self, and in so doing remains trapped within a version of his relation to the world which prevents him from facing or coming to terms with his own being. In-the-moment, there is still a split between Henderson and the world and between Henderson's essence (his spiritual self) and his presence (corporeal self) in his version or ideal of himself.

There appears to be an unconscious arrogance of both essence and presence embedded in Henderson's personality. The incident of the burning bush, cited earlier, is an example of his distracted state of self-delusion, a state of mind which allows him to sustain illusions of extended durability. At another point in the novel, Henderson relates how, in his opinion, Itelo sees him as a totem pole or as "a human Galapagos turtle" (HRK,

p. 66). His ironic gift of a raincoat to Queen Willatale further suggests through yet another action that Henderson has a sense of himself as omnipotently capable of protecting her from the rain--an element of the external world--or, given Bellow's description of his use of rain as "an emblem of the shared condition of all," capable of protecting himself from the shared condition of all others in the world, the condition of mortality.

One may, then, perceive the inner voice that urges Henderson to burst his spirit's sleep to be an indication in the present of his need to awaken from a state of limited personal selfhood and to continue toward a state of real being which may enable him to have an authentic existence in the world. Until Henderson is able to break through his spiritual paralysis, he will continue to pursue an ideal of self that can only lead to a despairing negation of the powers he could employ through his authentic being. In other words, as long as he is continually confronted by the failure of his attainment of his own idea of himself he will continue to be inclined to renounce reality and, thereby, his own vital humanity. That such an ongoing tendency is likely is evidenced in Henderson's own thoughts, related through his feelings of grief:

I had been very downcast, what with the voice that said I want and all the rest of it. I had come to look upon the phenomena of life as so many medicines which would either cure my condition or aggravate it. But the condition! Oh, my



condition! First and last that condition! It made me go around with my hand on my breast like the old pictures of Montcalm passing away on the plains of Abraham (HRK, p. 65).

In his confrontation with the Arnewi, what Henderson seems unable to perceive fully is that any medicine of human construction is not able to cure him of mortality. Despite all of his striving and the efforts he puts forth physically, and despite his mental calculations and analyses, there will still be frogs in reality. In-the-moment, Henderson seems envious of the literal, Arnewi frogs' at-oneness with their environment, and his description of them is yet another instance of his inability to grasp his own world: "They say the air is the final home of the soul, but I think that as far as the senses go you probably can't find a sweeter medium than water. So the life of those frogs must have been beautiful, and they fulfilled their ideal. . . ." (HRK, p. 88). The paralysis of spirit that is reflected in Henderson's admiration of the frogs corresponds to Prufrock's reflection that he "should have been a pair of ragged claws." In his envy of the frogs' uncomplicated existence in the natural world, Henderson fails to take into account the fact that the frogs, less than human beings, have no ideal. They, therefore, do not suffer the stretches of human imagination nor are they capable of constructing versions of their existence beyond their nature. Existentially viewed, the frogs

exist in the Umwelt mode of world, the "world around." This is the biological world, the environment. All organisms (animal and human) have an Umwelt mode of world which includes biological needs, drives, instincts, as well as the world of objects about, the natural world. Man, however, is thrown into this mode of world and holds within himself the potentiality of extending himself beyond its realm through his imagination. Henderson's admiration of the frogs in their environment indicates a momentary distancing of his own self-awareness. Whereas one could, hypothetically, still exist in the world around if one had not self-awareness, Henderson cannot for he is in the process of an ontological crisis leading him toward authentic being. His admiration is a brief distancing from his own awareness of his state of becoming in the world perceived not merely as an "environment" but as a world of the self and of the selves of other human beings as well.

To this point in the novel, one may view Henderson as being in the process of examining his position in the natural world and of being, furthermore, in the process of developing an existential awareness. Having destroyed the cistern and frogs, Henderson leaves the Arnewi in disgrace and despair. He is not, however, the same Henderson who, pages earlier, greeted the tribe. He leaves equipped with the mystery of "Grun-tu-molani," the desire to live as a whole man, and with a beginning awareness that to conquer

the realities of the natural world, one's physical needs, and so forth, is not the final struggle. Sensing that another stage of awareness is necessary, Henderson chooses to continue his journey rather than to return to America and abrogate his developing consciousness. Leaving the Arnewi, he is still not fully aware that beyond obstacles offered by the external world there is another to be overcome. In order to achieve an authentic existence, a life without frogs, Henderson has yet to confront the reality of death. Unlike natural world reality with its biological needs and so on, authentic reality, the I want reality of Henderson and all other selves in the world, is always victorious; it greets all men each morning with the sun in spite of their struggles, efforts, achievements of the day before, and leaves them in despair. Leaving the Arnewi, Henderson is still besieged by a separation between his concept about his condition and his actual existence as a being in the world.

After weary days of walking, Henderson and Romilayu reach the Wariri, a more aggressive tribe whose first act is to seize all his civilized possessions, leaving him only the clothes he wears as a reminder of the world he has come from. With their arrival, Henderson notes that the Wariri village has "bigger buildings, some of them wooden" (HRK, p. 118), some of them complete with flowers and fences. In contrast to the Arnewi, the social organization of the

Wariri is relatively sophisticated with advisors, police chiefs, soldiers, ministers, and other kinds of officials indicative of an advanced society. Henderson has journeyed from the prehistoric culture of the Arnewi to the more civilized culture of the Wariri. Bellow's careful choice of words such as "radar" suggest that he includes, within the scope of the novel as symbol, the elements of contemporary civilization. Furthermore, the contrast between the two villages seems to function in bringing Henderson and his "condition" into closer profile with the perspectives and problems of modern society.

Like the Arnewi, the Wariri are troubled by drought, and Henderson is granted, by their King Dahfu--with whom Prince Itelo had attended college in Beirut--the special privilege of being given a seat of honor in order to watch the rain-making proceedings. The ritual consists of two parts: first, Dahfu and a young girl play a game of catch using the skulls of Dahfu's father and grandfather. While admiring the skill and grace demonstrated by Dahfu and his opponent, Henderson also feels there is something ominous and foreboding about the game. During the main part of the ceremony, a large number of wooden gods are placed in the center of an arena where they are whipped, kicked, and subjected to various indignities by several Wariri people, to the considerable joy and delight of the audience. During the second part of the ritual, the figures are

carried, one by one, to another location a short distance away, and only two remain, Hummat, the mountain god, and Mummah, goddess of clouds. One of the stronger Wariri manages to move Hummat but is unable to lift the larger, Mummah. Following his disgraceful experience among the Arnewi, Henderson is longing to do something for people, for "others," that will have some meaning. The feeling of longing and the need to act in the moment prompt Henderson to volunteer to try to move the giant woden goddess Mummah, who must be propitiated if rain is to come and whose bulk has overwhelmed all of the Wariri contestants. Henderson moves the statue even though, not believing in the ceremony, he has made a bet with the king that the ritual will not produce rain. One perceives the contest to be an opportunity for Henderson to demonstrate his physical power, and therefore to make some compensation to nature for the gift of strength he feels he has, in the past, abused. The challenge of lifting the stolid goddess, Mummah, in other words, becomes, for Henderson, an opportunity to make a gesture against the "law of decay" (HRK, p. 190) by which he has always lived. Successful in his efforts to lift the goddess--whom he regards as being "a living personality, not an idol" (HRK, p. 192)--Henderson is immediately filled with joy.

I stood still. There beside Mummah in her new situation I myself was filled with happiness. I was so gladdened by what I had done that my whole

body was filled with soft heat, with soft and sacred light. The sensations of illness I had experienced since morning were all converted into their opposites. These same unhappy feelings were changed into warmth and personal luxury. You know, this kind of thing has happened to me before. I have had a bad headache change into a pain in the gums which is nothing but the signal of approaching beauty. I have know this then to pass down from the gums and appear again in my breast as a throb of pleasure. I have also known a stomach complaint to melt from my belly and turn into a delightful heat and go down into the genitals. This is the way I am. And so my fever was transformed into jubilation. My spirit was awake and it welcomed life anew! I was still alive and kicking and I had the old grun-tu-molani. . . . Beaming and laughing to myself, yes, sir, shining with contentment, I went back to sit beside Dahfu's hammock and wiped my face with a handkerchief, for I was anointed with sweat (HRK, pp. 192-193).

Henderson bursts his spirit's sleep with this epiphany and, having passed through the experience, reaches the second major stage in the development of his authenticity as a being in the world. Henderson is now, Sungo, or rain king. Through Bellow's use of "sacred light" and "anointed with sweat," one perceives the existential nature of Henderson's experience; it is one of deep spiritual enlightenment. Henderson's "illness" (reminiscent of his earlier dizziness) is, in-the-moment, absent. His "fever" is "transformed into jubilation." In this stage of his development toward authentic being, Henderson's transformation is not merely a matter of degree, but one of major consequence. In direct contrast to his exhibition of technical ingenuity with the Arnewi frogs, Henderson relies

solely on his own strength to lift Mummah. He is able to burst his spirit's sleep through a rejection of any exterior world knowledge or information and through an acceptance of total reliance upon his own resources. "I had the old grun-tu-molani," he shouts, and he feels life "anew," because he has made a commitment to act, to struggle, to work within himself, alone. The result is that for the first time in the experiential dimension of the novel Henderson is able to produce something of genuine value not only to himself but to others in the world as well. Up to the moment of his awakening, Henderson has been entrapped by a false vision of himself in relation to his world. Part of the entrapment ensued from his false vision of a separation between his spirit and his body. Just before he successfully lifts Mummah, Henderson expresses the idea that, were it not for his physical-psychological body presence, he (as essence) in his vision of self would not be in jeopardy of the inevitability of death.

Oh, my body, my body! Why have we never really got together as friends? I have loaded it with my vices, like a raft, like a barge. Oh, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Anyway, from these distortions owing to my scale and the work performed by my psyche. And sometimes a voice has counseled me, crazily, "Scorch the earth. Why should a good man die? Let it be some blasted fool who is dumped in the grave. . . (HRK, p. 182).

Despite all of his earlier wood-chopping and physical pursuits, Henderson's body has never before been truly within his perspective of being; up to the moment, his body has been an obstacle (an object in the exterior world). From his earlier point of view, his vision of real being, of authenticity, has been impossible to achieve, since he has been imagining himself outside his body, or outside existence. Henderson's false mode of imaginative vision pertaining to his own body is transformed in the moment in which he feels his spirit's sleep awaken. Up to that moment, it has not been Henderson's literal (physical and psychological) body which has alienated him from himself and others so much as his idea of that body. Once he undertakes the search for his real self (the being in process) behind his obstructive idea-of-body (its appearance to him), the imaginative obstructiveness disintegrates.

Another aspect of Henderson's false vision which has, to the moment of his spirit's awakening, kept him in bondage to an idea of self relates to his childlike and innocent state of mind. As mentioned earlier, Queen Willatale first informs Henderson that he is still looking at the world as a child might. In moving the goddess of clouds, Henderson also moves the clouds of illusion from his vision of self as omnipotent, as a child perceives himself to be the center of his sense of the world. Henderson's passage from an innocent state of mind to a



mature, yet still visionary, state of mind is not yet complete. He, in other words, is not yet fully aware of the change in his being that one, as reader, experiences in the moment. Yet the change is a significant step toward a state of mind in which Henderson will be totally free of self-illusions and totally without need to produce imaginative constructs to support those illusions.

Since, so far, the "grief" and "jubilation" experienced by Henderson are spiritual states of being, they can be experienced by anyone. Regarded from this angle, the essence of the novel can no longer be captured in some concept of parody or absurdity. This is not to say that such concepts are not true, but simply that they are not particularly relevant if one tries to force the novel into the narrow confines of either one of them. Henderson exists in his body as everyone must, and in the moment his "spirit's sleep is broken" he becomes aware that his problem is to make that body transparent to himself and others. The novel, therefore, is exploring an experience that is everyone's ontological concern, and Henderson's "grief" and "jubilation" are means by which one recognizes this concern.

A skeptical reader might view this envisioning of real being as romantic or naive and refer to Henderson's vision as innocent. Referring to this tendency, Frye states:

Nearly all of us have felt, at least in childhood, that if we imagine that a thing is so, it therefore either is so or can be made to become so. All of us have to learn that this almost never happens, or happens only in very limited ways; but the visionary, like the child, continues to believe that it always ought to happen. We are so possessed with the idea of the duty of acceptance that we are inclined to forget our mental birthright, and prudent and sensible people encourage us in this. . . . the fact is that imagination creates reality, and as desire is part of imagination, the world we desire is more real than the world we passively accept.<sup>7</sup>

The real world, according to Frye, is the world of the imagination, and the fact that we must project the imaginative world into the future rather than living in it is a reflection of our "fallen" condition, our tendency to see the exterior rather than metaphysical body of our world. The fact that man is free to regard himself imaginatively makes Henderson's vision of at-oneness during the bursting of his spirit's sleep not comic, absurd, or illusory, but real and quite possible. Whether the reader believes in or even is familiar with Heidegger's particular philosophical doctrine of man as being-in-the-world is not relevant since the reader experiences Henderson's psychic state simply by being alive. One knows, for instance, through one's own experience, that man is capable of two points of view, the external, in which one is perceived by another as a psychophysical object, and the imaginative in which he is viewed

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7. Northrop Frye, Fearful Symmetry (Boston: Cambridge University Press, 1947), p. 16.

as a person, a being in process. The reader who is living in his imaginative dimension is capable of realizing the particular state Henderson envisions. Henderson's illumination occurs not because he has been unconscious of his alienation from real being nor because he seeks to achieve an impossible state of being, but because, unable to dismiss the immediate experience of his existential condition with some idea about it, he is driven toward enlightenment. In the moment the deluge of rain occurs, therefore, one feels Henderson's purgation of confusion within Bellow's dramatization of the shared condition of humanity.

One is reminded that Henderson's awakening of spirit is not the final state in his development of real being. When Bellow follows Henderson's ecstatic monologue with a humiliating tour of the Wariri village, Henderson--the new Sungo' (Rain King)--is stripped naked by native women, chased through the village, dropped into muddy water holes that they might be blessed with water, and, finally, overwhelmed by a shouting, whip-flailing group of his worshippers. There is in-the-moment a certain tension between the subject-object and ontological points of view. Whereas Bellow's depiction of the scene has obvious comic and ironic effects, Henderson's immediate experiences do not. "Nor was any humour intended. All was done in the greatest earnestness. I came, dripping stale mud, out of the pond. I hoped at least this would cover my shame, for

the flimsy grasses, flying, had let everything open" (HRK, p. 199). And, a paragraph later, he says, "With swollen throats the amazons cried and howled, and I, lumbering with them, tried to remember who I was. Me" (HRK, p. 199). Ontologically, one feels pain, degradation, and shame in Henderson's first realization of his humanism and his spiritual nakedness. Henderson's immersion into an awareness of being that enables him to confront, for the first time, the facts of his own existence is a painful transition. Given the effects of his spiritual awakening, the facts of his existence appear starkly discouraging.

This is how I become the rain king. I guess it served me right for mixing into matters that were none of my damned business. But the thing had been irresistible, one of those drives which there was no question of fighting. And what had I got myself into? What were the consequences? On the ground floor of the palace, filthy, naked, and bruised, I lay in a little room. The rain was falling, drowning the town, dropping from the roof in heavy fringes, witchlike and gloomy. Shivering, I covered myself with hides and stared with circular eyes, wrapped to the chin in the skins of unknown animals (HRK, p. 203).

In-the-moment, one sees Henderson in despair but not in full understanding of his existential experience and newly achieved state of awareness. When Romilayu asks, "Whu fo' you did it, sah?" Henderson can offer no explanation, though he hopes to be able to in some future state of his existence.

Oh, Romilayu, . . . if I could explain that I wouldn't be where I am today. . . . I don't know why it is I have such extreme intensity. The

whole thing is so peculiar the explanation will have to be peculiar too. Figuring will get me nowhere, it's only illumination that I have to wait for. And thinking of how black things were and how absent any illumination was I sighed and moaned again (HRK, p. 204).

In discouragement brought on by the shattering beginnings of his new sense of his existence, Henderson turns to King Dahfu, who introduces him to the extensions of grun-tu-molani.

I know that Arnewi expression. . . . Yes, I have been there, too, with Itelo. I understand what this grun-tu-molani implies. Indeed I do. . . . Granted, grun-tu-molani is much, but it is not alone sufficient. Mr. Henderson, more is required (HRK, p. 217).

Thus begins Dahfu's attempt to show Henderson how he can move from an arrested state of becoming into a state of being. Despite his confusion in the moment, one perceives in Henderson an essential visionary nature. His earlier childlike insistence that the world can and should be something other than a location for suffering has been to a degree altered by his existential experience during the rain ceremony, but it has not ceased to be. At this point in the novel one has grown increasingly aware of the need for such a visionary nature in man's state of being in the world.

Henderson's fascination with Daniel's prophecy to Nebuchadnezzar, mentioned early in this chapter, comes back to him when he agrees to become a student of Dahfu's philosophy, for this means entering the den of Atti, the

massive lioness imprisoned beneath the palace. Through emulation of Atti's movements and sounds one may, according to Dahfu's doctrine for living, learn humility and capture the dignity nature intends higher creatures to demonstrate. Weakened by fever, by his duties as Rain King, by his efforts to understand palace intrigues and Dahfu's intricate philosophy, Henderson begins once again to think of reality as an unbearable complex of pressures. His viewpoint is understandable to Dahfu, who argues that

Men of most powerful appetite have always been the ones to doubt reality the most. Those who could not bear that hopes should turn to misery, and loves to hatreds, and deaths to silences, and so on. The mind has a right to its reasonable doubts, and with every short life it awakens and sees and understands what so many other minds of equally short life span have left behind. It is natural to refuse belief that so many small spans should have made so glorious one large thing. That human creatures by pondering should be correct. That is what makes a fellow gasp. Yes, Sungo, this same temporary creature is a master of imagination. And right now this very valuable possession appears to make him die and not to live. Why? It is astonishing what a fact that is (HRK, p. 232).

Through his relationship with the vital and sympathetic Dahfu, Henderson begins to believe that there is a ruling force to which one can appeal in moments of need. When Dahfu must capture the soul of his father wandering in the form of a lion, Henderson prays for the king's safety, appealing to the undefined force. Each night since his arrival in Africa, moreover, Henderson has with increasing interest watched Romilayu at his prayers. Finally, anxious

for Dahfu's life, Henderson, kneeling beside the native guide, prays:

"Oh, you. . . . Something," I said, "you Something because of whom there is not Nothing. Help me to do Thy will. Take off my stupid sins. Untrammel me. Heavenly Father, open up my dumb heart and for Christ's sake preserve me from unreal things. O, Thou who tookest me from pigs, let me not be killed over lions. And forgive my crimes and nonsense and let me return to Lily and the kids (HRK, p. 253).

Henderson's appeal to a supernatural power is not consistent with critical accounts describing the persona of Bellow's novel through the "absurd man" concept. Ontologically perceived, however, there is no paradox in the fact that Henderson's prayer suggests an order in the universe opposite to almost everything reality has revealed to him up to that moment. This provides an example of how certain critical perspectives which are subject-object oriented may, through a larger focus of ontological concern, resolve inherent paradoxes.

Through his relationship with Dahfu, the lion, and Romilayu, Henderson is increasing the self awareness necessary for him to attain real being. Dahfu in particular urges Henderson to "seize the day"--to live in the moment, the here-and-now. Atti, the lioness, is his audiovisual aid for programmed instruction on the nature of reality.

"You ask, what she can do for you? Many things. First, she is unavoidable. Test it, and you will find she is unavoidable. And this is what you need

as you are an avoider. Oh, you have accomplished monumentous avoidances. But she will change that. She will make consciousness to shine. She will burnish you. She will force the present moment upon you. Second, lions are experiences. But not in haste. They experience with deliberate luxury. The poet says, 'The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction.' Let us embrace lions also in the same view. Moreover, observe Atti. Contemplate her. How does she stride, how does she saunter, how does she lie or gaze or rest or breathe? . . . She has much to teach you."

"Teach? You really mean that she might change me."

"Excellent. Precisely. Change. You fled what you were. You did not believe you had to perish" (HRK, p. 260).

Up until the moment of his confrontation with Atti, one feels Henderson's avoidance of reality because as Dahfu points out, Henderson has not believed he had to perish. More importantly, in the sensory dimension, one does not want to believe that in some moment one's existence will cease to be, and not wanting to believe, one is able to continue to play the child and create a version of reality. By insisting that Henderson will learn by imitating Atti's behavior, Dahfu hopes to purge Henderson of his fear of losing his concept of himself: "When the fear yields, a beauty is disclosed in its place. This is also said of perfect love, if I recollect, and it means that ego emphasis is removed" (HRK, p. 262). Henderson holds back out of a fear of death as it manifests itself in an emphasis on his individuality. As Dahfu tells his student, Henderson, "The tendency of your consciousness is to



isolate self" (HRK, p. 264). From the perspective of Dahfu's philosophy, by becoming the lion Henderson should be able to shed this isolated self and by so doing submit wholly to reality. Briefly, Dahfu contends that man may become whatever he chooses.

It is all a matter of having a desirable model in the cortex. For the noble self-conception is everything. For as conception is, so the fellow is. Put differently, you are in the flesh as your soul is. And in the manner described a fellow really is the artist of himself (HRK, p. 268).

Accepting the Sartrean idea that one is the sum of one's own choices, Henderson continues the lion lessons as a kind of therapy by which he hopes to renounce the tendency of his consciousness "to isolate self." Throughout several days the lessons continue with Dahfu reassuring Henderson that he will achieve the fearless equanimity of Atti through imitation, since, as he explains, "Observe that Atti is all lion. Does not take issue with the inherent. Is one hundred percent within the given" (HRK, p. 263). In the confrontation with Atti, one sees in Henderson a developing realization that the essence of self-awareness and insight is that they are "there"--instantaneous, immediate--and that the moments of awareness hold significance throughout the time of one's existence. Within the lion's den, Henderson is able to renounce the tendency of his consciousness "to isolate self." Roaring like Atti, Henderson seems to release everything in the spirit of his

"personal self" that has ever wanted to come forth. His ultimate moment of roaring is a summation of the past life of his "isolated" self and an existential expression of all his human longing.

. . . 'from birth to Africa; and certain words crept into my roars,' he says, 'like "God," "Help," "Lord have mercy," only they came out "Hoolp!" "Mooooorcy!" It's funny what words sprang forth. "Au secours," which was "secooooooooor" and also "De profooooooooondis," plus snatches from the "Messiah" (he was despised and rejected, a man of sorrows, et cetera)' (HRK, p. 274).

Regardless of his fear of the lion and a fever that makes his "exercises" painful and exhausting, Henderson continues to put forth effort. Ontologically perceived, his persistence is born out of both his relationship with and his feelings for Dahfu and out of his own existential longing for hope and for love. On one hand, Henderson believes in Dahfu as a person because he is able to face the world and its reality without illusion or fear: "Why . . . there's something about danger that doesn't perplex that guy. Look at all the things he has to fear, and still look at the way he lies on that sofa. . . . But on the table near him he has those two skulls used at the rain ceremony, one his father's and the other his grandfather's" (HRK, p. 277). Dahfu seems able to live the lesson Henderson learned when he burst his spirit's sleep, that is, that one is in death while in the midst of life. Knowing "what life and death is," Dahfu keeps visual

reminders near-by as a part of that existence. His is an attitude of accepting exactly what one is and no more. On the other hand, however, Henderson's persistence may also be viewed as related to his developing awareness of his real being. Whereas he has not fully gained his state of authentic being, he has developed a sense of his identity as being ontologically related to other beings in the world. With this identification there is an existential longing for love and a feeling of hope. Now, rather than attacking or criticizing the external world, Henderson is able to admire it and express hope that it can be changed for the better. He no longer hopes as an isolated self but as a self that has grown to be integrated within the world of mankind. His visionary argument for a better world is possible at this point in the novel because Henderson now feels himself to be within humanity, the universal ground of being.

Americans are supposed to be dumb, but they are willing to go into this. It isn't just me. You have to think about White Protestantism and the Constitution and the Civil War and capitalism and winning the West. All the major tasks and the big conquests were done before my time. That left the biggest problem of all, which was to encounter death. We've just got to do something about it. It isn't just me. Millions of Americans have gone forth since the war to redeem the present and discover the future. I can swear to you, Romilayu, there are guys exactly like me in India and in China and in South America and all over the place. Just before I left home I saw an interview in the paper with a piano teacher from Muncie who became a Buddhist monk in Burma. You see, that's what I mean. I am a high-spirited kind of

guy. And it's the destiny of my generation of Americans to go out into the world and try to find the wisdom of life. It just is. Why the hell do you think I'm out here anyway? (HRK, pp. 276-277).

Part of the wisdom that Henderson finds is in the self-knowledge that he cannot place the self in any other world, that, regardless of how much of a struggle his life may seem to be, he must live in the present moment with reality: "I should move from the states that I myself make into the state which are of themselves" (HRK, p. 284). Although Henderson admits, "I don't think the struggles of desire can ever be won," one feels no hopelessness in-the-moment since despite Henderson's realization he continues to gain the benefits of the struggle itself. Dahfu has warned him that there is no release from perpetual fear and desire unless man is willing to take like into his own hands. One feels that Henderson's skepticism regarding just how much he can learn from Atti is indicative of the developing, final stage of his growth toward authentic being. At this point he is beginning to feel that his world (man's world) is something beyond the environment (natural world) of the animals with which he has identified himself in order to find the "wisdom of life." But just as the pigs offered him no solution, so too, he doubts that his imitation of the lioness will enable him to live "one hundred percent within the given" in his own state of

being-in-the-world. He feels unable to share Dahfu's confidence that through Atti one may learn that which one is.

But then what could an animal do for me? In the last analysis? Really? A beast of prey? Even supposing that an animal enjoys a natural blessing? We had our share of this creature--blessing until infancy ended. But now aren't we required to complete something else--project number two--the second blessing? I couldn't tell such things to the king, he was so stuck on lions (HRK, p. 288).

Henderson's statement indicates he has discovered that imitation of Atti--more generally, identification with any exteriority--is to remain fixed within a state of becoming. Through the lioness, however, Henderson has reached a more elevated state of becoming than those in which he had earlier existed, he is still not in authentic being, that is, not something of his own, as long as he experiences his existence through a lion-model. Dahfu's existence, on the other hand, is founded upon what is from an ontological persuasion a contrived relationship with lions. Atti is a persona non grata to all of the Wariri except Dahfu. Furthermore she is an imposter, not the lion holding the spirit of Dahfu's predecessor. Dahfu, however, will not relinquish her companionship. He perceives her to be the source of his strength of spirit and of his ability to live totally "within the given." In-the-moment in which Henderson felt that humanity seemed inferior to the animal, lion-lessons were necessary. At this point, however, a healthy doubt as to the efficacy of the

animal-human relationship is called forth although, as Henderson says, he "might pick up a small grain here and there."

At this juncture one feels Dahfu to have been for Henderson a physical and spiritual ideal. Within his own existence, the king is able to affirm the meaningfulness of human life, speaking as he does of mankind's "noble possibilities." Ontologically perceived, that affirmation in Dahfu himself is more meaningful to one's awareness of being-in-the-world than are his philosophies or doctrines--all exteriorly-founded--concerning man and his life and destiny. Dahfu, furthermore, is able to impose imagination on reality. "What homo sapiens imagines, he may slowly convert himself to," says Dahfu who is immersed in reality, but who is also an idealist. Just as Henderson earlier played his violin to communicate with his father, so Dahfu, on the day he is killed, intends to be "reunited with a dear parent," in Henderson's words (HRK, p. 289). Up to the point where Henderson's doubts emerge regarding what can be learned from lions, he has seen in Dahfu an ideal of the man he desires to be. He has been, through his admiration for Dahfu, locked into a false subject-object existence in which he has felt his growth toward real being could be achieved through an exterior source. What is more important from the existential-ontological viewpoint is that through Dafu's ability to live with joy--contentment--

in the presence of death, Henderson has been able to grow closer to an awareness of himself as being in the world. Thus it is Dahfu himself, more than the lioness, who teaches Henderson what it is to be. Even by the time of his letter to Lily, Henderson is changed. He has partially entered the given and reality--not as a version--but as it is. He knows, for example, that the stars are "endless fire," not small golden objects as one sees them, and he knows he will never "leave the body of this death" (HRK, p. 285). He realizes that he has avoided the presence of death and in so doing has avoided reality and his own capacity for authentic being: "I wanted to raise myself into another world" (HRK, p. 284). No longer attempting to impose his version of reality upon his existence in the world, Henderson says, "I had a voice that said 'I want!' I want? I? It should have told me she wants, he wants, they want" (HRK, p. 286). Ontologically perceived, Henderson has in-the-moment entered the Mitwelt, the "with-world" of beings of one's own kind. He is able to enter the mode of world that relates him to all other beings, to mankind, through his realization that to this point in his existence he has deceived himself by living a version of reality. Thus Henderson's transcendence into an authentic being-in-process is almost complete. His now having an awareness of himself in both the natural mode of world, the Umwelt, "world around," and the Mitwelt, all that

remains is his final recognition of the mode of "own-world," of relationship to himself. This realization is brought forth in the final actions of the novel.

The major, remaining expression of Henderson's still extant opposition to reality comes when he witnesses Dahfu's attempts to capture the lion presumably bearing the soul of his father. Perched on a strip of wood, high above the trap into which the lion is driven, Henderson describes the scene as Dahfu prepares to make the capture:

Then, at the very doors of consciousness, there was a snarl and I looked down from this straw perch--I was on my knees--into the big, angry, hair-framed face of the lion. It was all wrinkled, contracted; within those wrinkles was the darkness of murder. The lips were drawn away from the gums, and the breath of the animal came over me, hot as oblivion, raw as blood. I started to speak aloud. I said, "Oh my God, whatever you think of me, let me not fall under this butcher shop. Take care of the king. Show him Thy mercy." And to this, as a rider, the thought added itself that this was all mankind needed, to be conditioned into the image of a ferocious animal like the one below. I then tried to tell myself because of the clearness of those enraged eyes that only visiors ever got so hyper-actual. But it was no vision. The snarling of this animal was indeed the voice of death. And I thought how I had boasted to my dear Lily how I loved reality. "I love it more than you do," I had said. But on, unreality! Unreality, unreality! That has been my scheme for a troubled but eternal life. But now I was blasted away from this practice by the throat of the lion. His voice was like a blow at the back of my head (HRK, pp. 306-307).

From the existential-ontological perspective, this voice is the voice of reality, of truth that Henderson has always felt comes in blows. This lion is death itself, not



Atti: "Compared with this creature, Atti was no bigger than a lynx" (HRK, p. 307). The implication is that one can, like a child, play games with a smaller version of reality and in so doing deceive one's self into believing one is living with the truth well in hand. This lion, however, is "death itself" and Henderson is horrified by the idea that mankind should even for one moment allow itself to be thrown into such an image, into this authentic vision of reality. The voice of the monstrous lion threatening Dahfu jars Henderson's mind from any hope of escape from reality through versions or unreal constructs. The lion, by symbolic extension, is the "old self" of Henderson that must die, as well as it is an image of death. The process of shedding his inauthentic self has been difficult for Henderson up to this point because he has felt the presence of his inauthentic self more intensely as his awareness of his real being has increased. As he has noted earlier, he has felt the "old self . . . all the time. It's got a terrific grip on me. I began to cough and grunt and I was in despair. As if I were carrying an eight-hundred-pound load--like a Galapagos turtle. On my back" (HRK, p. 275). In-the-moment that Henderson sees the reality of death in the "face of the lion" in the trap below, he is able to let go of his "old self." What one recognizes and what Henderson has in-the-moment come to realize is that authentic being is possible

to attain, not through imitation or identification, but, rather, through moments of Angst which shock one into confronting reality.

Thus when Dahfu falls from his position above the enclosure which houses the lion, Henderson leaps down with him. As the king lies dying, Henderson throws himself on the "bitch" of reality and makes it fast with a rope. Reality is now no longer an abstraction for Henderson, it is literally tied into his existence as a being in the ongoing process of becoming in the world. As he is dying, Dahfu tells Henderson that as Sungo he is destined to be the new king. Using his own mental and physical resources, Henderson (accompanied by Romilayu) escapes an exteriorly-designed destiny. Now at peace in his own authentic self, he is no longer subject to any objective version of how his life is to be lived. Thus he avoids becoming a puppet king bonded to the scheming politicians of the Wariri and to their particular version of reality. After days of agonizing travel on foot, Henderson, accompanied by Romilayu, returns to civilization. Equipped as he is now with an authentic self, Henderson is able to return to his life amongst the "other" selves in what was to him, before his trip to Africa, an imposing, erratic, and confusing existence among the inauthentic beings of his "parents," "wives," "girls," "animals," and so forth. Ontologically aware, Henderson is now able to pursue his life in a

personally directed manner that is no longer vulnerable to any exterior forces. He has, in-the-moment of facing death-as-a-reality in his own life, entered the mode of "own-world," the Eigenwelt, which presupposes self-awareness, self-relatedness, and which is uniquely present in being (human) in the process of becoming. This is not to say that Henderson's entrance into a state of real being is merely a subjective, inner experience; it is, rather, the basis upon which he is now able to see the real world in its true perspective. He is now, therefore, able to relate to others and whether those others are authentic or inauthentic in their own particular states of self-awareness is irrelevant, that is, exterior to Henderson's state of being. Through an immediate sensory encounter with the persona, one is able to grasp the vitality of one's own being in the world. The self that omits or rejects its "own world" is one contributing to one's own loss of the sense of the reality of immediate experience.

Before leaving the civilization of the Wariri, Henderson insists on taking the lion cub that was staked out by the corpse of Dahfu, the cub that supposedly holds within it the soul of the dead king. One senses Henderson's need for a vital reminder of man's ability, given an authentic being, to live with contentment in the presence of an awareness that at some future moment one's existence will cease to be. Henderson's friend, Dahfu, has

demonstrated the capacity of man to accept his own mortality without fear and with grace. In so doing, Dahfu has provided Henderson with a vicarious version of Henderson's own death. Henderson lives through his fears, through his own castration and death in that of Dahfu. Henderson is the one who earlier was terrified of castration and of death when first he encountered Atti. Dahfu, however, is the one who receives both realities. After he is clawed and before he dies, Dahfu is at peace. "I never took another death so hard," Henderson says. "As I tried to stop his bleeding, there was blood all over me and soon it was dry" (HRK, p. 314). One may perceive the statement to be not only a physical manifestation of the closeness between the two, but, also, as a symbolic manifestation of Henderson's having confronted the reality of his own death in Dahfu's. Further it is the immediate experience which causes Henderson to take the lion cub (Dahfu's spirit) into his "own world." This is not to say that Henderson attempts to incorporate Dahfu as a kind of double within himself. Rather, one feels Henderson's taking the cub into his existence as being-in-the-world is simply a living reminder of his new vision of life as not always harsh or effortless. Changed as he now is, following Dahfu's death, Henderson is beginning to be aware of the necessity of perpetual self-struggle. The struggle is neither impossible to sustain nor merely easy to maintain. In-the-moment,

Henderson is changed and capable of entering the given of the struggle, of reality as it is. While planning his escape from the tomb in which he, as well as Dahfu, was at an earlier moment contained, Henderson is able to remember the death of his brother Dick without guilt. In that particular moment he is also without fear and prepared to murder if necessary in order to escape an exteriorly-designed fate. From an ontological persuasion, the symbology of the lion cub, therefore, suggests that Henderson has reached a level of self-awareness in which he now knows that the moments of his personal existence will always hold the potentiality of both grief and contentment. In-the-moment following the death of Dahfu, Henderson is at peace with reality. He kisses the earth, for example, and calls the grass his cousins. Aware, now, that dead is dead, he says: "Dahfu will never be seen again, and presently I will never be seen again; but every one is given the components to see: the water, the sun, the air, the earth" (HRK, p. 333). Henderson has entered his own authentic selfhood, a state of being-in-the-world which he has been distanced from since early childhood. Within his new state of authentic existence in the world, Henderson is able to embrace the natural world, the "world around" with the enthusiastic joy of his childhood self--a modality of his authentic self.

It is very early in life, and I am out in the grass. The sun flames and swells; the heat it emits is its love, too. I have this self-same vividness in my heart. There are dandelions. I try to gather up this green. I put my love-swollen cheek to the yellow of the dandelions. I try to enter into the green (HRK, p. 283).

At one with his being in his "own world," Henderson is now able to be at one with the "world around." The natural world, the earth, is his and one feels Henderson now knows he belongs to it. No longer is the natural world an alienating and dislocating force in Henderson's experience of his existence. One perceives him to be as wholly within and of the earth as is, for example, any organism of the sea within and of that surrounding medium. The ontologically-focused reader has, of course, never perceived Henderson to be apart from the "world around." At this juncture in the novel, however, Henderson is able to see himself as within "world around" through the imaginative transformation which has taken place in his own vision of self. The transformation is reinforced by Bellow when he introduces the bear, Smolak, near the conclusion of the novel. Having run from home feeling rejected by his father after his brother's death, Henderson worked for a carnival in Canada. He was paid to ride a roller coaster with Smolak, an old trained bear. Both smitten--aliens, orphans, they hugged one another as they rode in fear and anxiety; therefore, as Henderson says, he "didn't come to pigs tabula rasa" (HRK, pp. 338-339). The fact that Henderson

recalls the experience in-the-moment is indicative of his new insight "that for creatures there is nothing that ever runs unmingled" (HRK, p. 339). This is not to say that Henderson's vision is merely an acknowledgment of his natural (animal) existence, but, rather, that Henderson is now able to grasp the universal ground of being that unites all living things. Given his recollection of Smolak, Henderson's transformation of vision is not merely understandable but, also, ontologically real. Here again, the existential-ontological perspective allows the reader to experience the reality of Henderson's experiences directly. In so doing, the reader is not subject to concerns such as whether the transformation has been earned and whether one can accept the idea that Henderson is fundamentally different from what he was, on the basis of Bellow's words alone. Having experienced Henderson's actions and recollections through one's own immediate sensory responses one is able to believe in Henderson's now-present capacity to confront death and to be absorbed in reality.

Bidding Romilayu good-bye, Henderson with the lion cub flies toward home. The cub again reminds Henderson that something is promised to man, that being human one is intended at least the potentiality of justice through one's own efforts and self awareness. Henderson's inner voice has demanded reality and driven him through achievements and trials that have enabled him to live within that

reality. Ontologically, Henderson's search for the "wisdom of life" is successful since he is able to return from Africa in possession of the authentic selfhood he went to seek. What success means in-the-moment and how Henderson accomplishes it is understood through and reinforced by Bellow's symbology throughout the novel. Henderson has, through Bellow's symbolic adventures and misadventures, undergone in actual process an ontological crisis. Through Bellow's symbolic teacher-prophet Dahfu, Henderson enters a new existence as an authentic being, and after becoming naked before the Wariri he is reclothed in reality by the time he reaches Rome. On the journey back to America, Henderson is drawn to a small orphan "bound for Nevada with nothing but a Persian vocabulary" (HRK, p. 339). The boy, who is traveling to join the people who are to adopt him, and the lion cub are, in-the-moment, Henderson's sole companions. When the plane lands briefly in Newfoundland to refuel, Henderson lifts the young boy into his arms in an action one senses to be an effort to share something of the joy and warmth Henderson now feels in his own being. Slipping on the ice, he runs exuberantly around the airplane:

I told the kid, "Inhale. Your face is too white from your orphan's troubles. Breathe in this air, kid, and get a little color." I held him close to my chest. He didn't seem to be afraid that I would fall with him. While to me he was like medicine applied, and the air, too; it also was a remedy. Plus the happiness that I expected at Idlewild from



meeting Lily. And the lion? He was in it, too. Laps and laps I galloped around the shining and riveted body of the plane, behind the fuel trucks. Dark faces were looking from within. The great beautiful propellers were still, all four of them. I guess I felt it was my turn now to move, and so went running--leaping, leaping, pounding, and tingling over the pure white lining of the gray Arctic silence (HRK, pp. 340-341).

Henderson's feelings of joy and exuberance for life come in the midst of the cold and white landscape which Bellow has imbued with various symbols of death. What would from an exterior viewpoint suggest, again, an inconsistent or perhaps too easily won victory over one's fears and grief becomes within an ontological attitude a testimony to the transformation of imaginative vision which has occurred within a self that has reached a state of authentic being. Within the existential-ontological perspective, Henderson is in a being state which may in part resemble that of both Willatale and Dahfu, but which is fundamentally and uniquely a being state of Henderson's "own world." Ontologically, one's ability to love presupposes that one has already become a real being, an authentic individual. Within such a state of being one has comprehended the fundamental awareness that to love another person one must be sufficient unto one's own self. Having reached such a level of awareness in his own being, Henderson is ready for Lily, for love, for America. He no longer has need to "adjust" to other persons, to reduce them to objects external to his own sense of self. Knowing another human

being, like loving another human being, involves a kind of union, a dialectical participation with the "other" self. Henderson at the close of the novel is equipped with a readiness to love "others" in the world. Such a readiness is, ontologically, essential for one's ability to understand others.

The encounter with the being of another person has the power to arouse anxiety; it, also, may produce profound joy. In either case, it has the power to grasp and move one deeply. The reader understandably may be tempted to abstract himself from the immediacy of such an encounter by thinking of Henderson as just a comic idealist or absurd hero or by focusing only on certain mechanisms of his behavior. Should a reader adhere primarily to an exterior or technical view of Henderson, that reader has isolated himself from both the potential joy and anxiety of the immediate encounter at the cost not only of isolating himself from Henderson's authentic self but, also, at the cost of distorting the reality of the world of the novel. The reader who abstracts himself from the immediate encounter is not able to really see Henderson. This is not to disparage the importance of technique, but to point out again that technique, like data, must be subordinated to the fact of the reality of two persons, of Henderson and the reader.

Thus from the ontological perspective, one is able to realize Henderson's achievement of inner peace because

one has, for instance, participated directly in Henderson's escape from the Wariri. Furthermore, one is able to grasp Henderson's present-moment readiness to love because one has responded moment-to-moment through one's own senses to Henderson's relationship to Romilayu and to his brief but significant relationship with the stewardess on the flight home. Neither of these relationships, viewed ontologically, can be regarded as mere indications of some newly-found capacity to love in the self of Henderson. They are, instead, actual experiences rendered possible through the emergence of Henderson's authentic state of being in the world and through that of the reader as being in the process of becoming. From the ontological perspective, one cannot accept the argument of critics who suggest that Henderson cannot enter into the reality of the reader since he is merely a romantic and symbolic figure of Bellow's version of reality. Such criticism by-passes consideration of the universal ground of being. Given such a perspective, no existential truth can omit the ontological relationship between Henderson and the reader. Furthermore, in greeting Henderson as a human being, the reader acknowledges that no truth has reality by itself. The truth of Henderson's transformation of self is not an external fact to be either accepted or rejected by the reader; rather, it is experienced within the sensorium of the reader moment-to-moment, and it is always dependent upon the

reality of the immediate relationship. Thus, the truth of Henderson's transformation cannot be considered to be external to the immediate world of the novel.

Within the scope of an ontological concern, Bellow's symbology reinforces Henderson's transformation into a state of authentic being. Through his life with the Arnewi, one senses that Henderson has grown aware of his mortality. In that first major stage of his development toward authenticity, he is able to accept his humanity and reject false illusions of omnipotence. Later, as Henderson lives with Dahfu and the Wariri, he develops further toward an acceptance of his essential humanity by rejecting the idea of self as wholly contained within an animal nature. At this point in the novel, Bellow seems to suggest that both modes of world are in man, when he selects to give Henderson the cub and boy as companions. The boy, as Henderson sees him, is "still trailing his clouds of glory." Henderson, however, adds to this observation, "I dragged mine on as long as I could till it got dingy, mere tatters of gray fog. However, I always knew what it was" (HRK, p. 339). In-the-moment, Henderson may be perceived as one who has entered a new self-awareness which enables him to realize the fact that, by rejecting reduction of self to an animal state that would deny the implications of "these clouds of glory," he has held within his life the potentiality of such implications

as his reason, imagination, and ability to love throughout his existence. Within the last few paragraphs of the novel, for example, he asserts, "Once more. Whatever gains I ever made were always due to love and nothing else" (HRK, p. 339). Through his own strength and through much suffering, Henderson has seen his authentic being, and he selects to live with the potential anxieties and joys of the new vision rather than to remain bound within a false and static concept of himself. Having a propensity of imagination, Henderson has a propensity of possibility of the self. By the closing paragraphs of the novel, he is able to grasp the possibility of the full intensity of that potentiality of self. His transcendence into a state of authentic being is a matter of self-realization rather than of knowledge alone. Having experienced various stages of an ongoing ontological crisis that is his existence in the world, Henderson, by the close of the novel, is not only ready to love but also ready to live within his own "self" in a perpetual state of ontological crisis. As he tells the airline stewardess: "You know why I'm impatient to see my wife, Miss? I'm eager to know how it will be now that the sleep is burst. And the children, too. I love them very much--I think" (HRK, p. 335). One perceives a kind of Yahweh experience in Henderson's transcendence, an illumination of "I am what I am," an

awareness that has emerged through his capacity for imagination and intensity of feeling in the moment. Now, Henderson is incapable of remaining satisfied with where he is in his "own world." One senses that he now realizes that his dissatisfaction of a given moment is the only authentic thing he has to give any others in the world. Henderson's decision, his determination to enter medical school in order to learn to serve humanity through healing, is an example of his need to grow in the present moment and into the future rather than to merely exist in past ideas or external theories of what his role in an exterior objective world should be. The achievement of his transcendence into a state of authentic being, lifts the idea of a new career in medicine out of the realm of abstract possibility. Engaged in the moment, Henderson is now no longer capable of subjecting himself to exterior versions of whether such a pursuit would be reasonable or logical or even practical. Regardless of the apparent ridiculousness of his decision, viewed from a deterministic or socially-exterior vantage point, Henderson's commitment indicates another instance of his now-present capacity to transcend his immediate situation in an external world. The commitment to medicine is, in one aspect of the ontological perspective, an indication of Henderson's present-moment ability and need to involve himself in the Mitwelt, the "with-world" of other beings. Henderson's growth toward

entrance into the world of "others" has, however, been accomplished by the point in the novel at which he writes his letter to Lily. What is of particular significance in the immediate moment, is that Henderson's capacity to commit himself to medicine may be perceived as an act of the imagination of an authentic being now capable of seeing that one's realization of authentic being provides no "cure" for one's problems. There is no automatic solution in the achievement of real being, but the state of awareness does present a precondition for the solution of one's problems.

Final Observations on Henderson's Transcendence into a State of Authentic Being

By the conclusion of the novel, it is possible to make four final observations on the total ontological experience of direct participation in Henderson's emergence of real being. First, Henderson's experience of "I-am," of authenticity of self, is not in itself the solution for Henderson's immediate moment or future moment struggles. Rather his new state of awareness is a preparation of self which will enable him to behave or react in certain ways and under certain conditions as offered in the moments of his existence. Throughout the development of the novel, Henderson has been able to work through specific problems with which he is confronted on the basis of his emerging experience of his own existence. Henderson's attainment of

real being is, in the broadest sense, the goal of Bellow's novel. In the more precise sense, however, the novel is the relation to one's self and one's world, an experience of one's own existence (including one's own identity), which is prerequisite to working through specific problems. The primary experience of self resides in the ongoing struggles of individual being. This is not to be identified with one's discovery of specific powers as when Henderson realizes, for instance, that he has the strength to out-wrestle Dahfu or lift Mummah. Exteriorly viewed, the discovery of one's specific powers and the experience of one's own being may seem to be completely correspondent, but the latter is the foundation, the precondition of the former. To extend the point, Henderson's solutions to his immediate-moment problems, the degree to which he feels chaos and grief at any given point in his existence, would have no real effect without an already present awareness of authenticity in his being. Up to the conclusion of the novel, Henderson has lacked a basic conviction of "I am, therefore I think, I act," and the absence of that conviction has rendered his prior solutions to his condition as merely compensatory. Up to his realization of authentic being, one may perceive him to have been simply exchanging one defense system for another, one technique or methodology for another, without ever truly experiencing himself as existing. Henderson is now capable of "relating" to



others, the world and himself since the act is now rooted in his own existence as a being-in-the-process-of-becoming in the world.

The second point evolving from Henderson's emergence of authentic being is that his particular experience cannot be totally explained by any concept of transference which implies that he has simply grown capable of human trust or that he has simply decided to love others in order to alleviate his profound sadness. Positive transference directed toward Lily, Ricey, the Persian boy, and, to a lesser degree, toward the stewardess, has, of course, taken place in Henderson's existence. His actions--the letter to Lily, the conversation with the stewardess--demonstrate that he is capable of loving and trusting another human being. His actions, however, do not account for the experience itself. Whereas it may well be true that the possibility of acceptance by and trust for another human being is a condition related to the experience of self illumination, the awareness of one's own being occurs fundamentally on the level of the grasping of one's own self. Realized within the realm of self-awareness, Henderson's experience of dasein cannot be explained essentially in social categories. His acceptance by Willatale, for example, reveals to Henderson that he no longer needs to confront the struggle with his condition in relation to whether anyone else or the world can accept

him; the acceptance of Willatale frees Henderson to experience his own being. Her acceptance does not accomplish the experience of being for him. The point is significant in view of the number of critics who regard the conclusion of the novel to be merely an accommodation or redemption of self. Such views, in other words, hold that Henderson achieves a state of real being simply because he decides finally to accept himself. To adhere to the idea that if one loves and accepts one's self, this is all that is needed, is an attitude in both life and criticism that may well encourage passivity. What is of fundamental importance, from the ontological view, is what Henderson himself --in his own awareness of and responsibility for his existence--does with the fact that he can be accepted by himself and others. Henderson's future moments cannot be, therefore, predetermined by a static concept of transference.

The third point to be derived from an ontological experience of Bellow's novel follows from the preceding one, that is, that Henderson's being cannot be reduced to introjection of social or ethical perspectives. His being, in other words, is beyond "good or bad," "true or false," or "real or unreal" appraisals. To the extent that Henderson's existence is authentic, it is precisely not what others may hold it to be. Rather, Henderson's authentic existence is now the point from which he in his

own world is able to evaluate what his "parents," "wives," "children," "animals," and so forth, demand. One may speculate that compulsive or rigid adherence to exterior critical accounts may arise in the reader in direct relation to the reader's lack of sense of authenticity in his own being. This is to say that strict adherence to any one single critical persuasion or formula may reflect a compensatory tendency by which the reader, having no assurance that his choices have sanction of their own, persuades himself to adopt some externally-sanctioned point of view. This is not to deny the considerable influence any one critical persuasion may have upon any given reader, but it is to say that the ontological sense cannot be reduced to such influences. The ontological sense in both the reader and in Henderson is not to be regarded as an ego phenomenon alone. By the same token, however, the sense of being gives both Henderson and the reader a basis of self-esteem which is not merely the reflection of others' points of view. If one's sense-of-self rests in the long run upon social validation, one has no authentic sense-of-self but rather a more or less sophisticated form of social conformity. This is to say, again, that for both reader and Henderson the sense of one's own existence, though interwoven with innumerable forms of social relatedness, is not basically the product of social forces; it always presupposes Eigenwelt, the "own world."

The fourth observation to be derived from an ontological experience of Bellow's novel is that Henderson's "I am" experience, his achievement of authentic being, cannot be identified with his feelings of pride or his considerable ego-functioning. Henderson's attainment of authentic being occurs on a more fundamental level than feelings he may hold toward himself. Thus, his sense of being is a precondition of his feelings of pride as well as a precondition for any other feelings Henderson may, in-the-moment, hold to be inherent in his personality. In other words, in both Henderson and in the reader, ego is a part of personality whereas the sense of being is one's whole and immediate experience, unconscious as well as conscious. Being, therefore, is not merely a means of awareness. Ontologically viewed, the prideful Henderson's apparently newly acquired humility is in no way contradictory. Up until the conclusion of the novel, Henderson's ego, his personality, and its attributes have been a reflection, a mirroring of the outside world, and not precisely his own sense of existence. Henderson's sense of being, one can say, is not a matter of his being able to see the external world, to size it up, or to assess reality; it is rather his developed capacity to see himself as a being-in-the-world, to know himself as the being who can, in-the-moment, do particular given things. Henderson's personality in any given moment of his existence is and

will continue to be the subject in a subject-object relationship. His sense of being, on the other hand, occurs on a level prior to this dichotomy. By the point of his return to America, one may see Henderson as having recognized that his being means not "I am the subject," but rather "I am the being who can, among other things, know himself as the subject of what is occurring." Ontologically perceived, Henderson's authentic sense of being is not in origin set against the outside world, but it includes the capacity to be set against the external world if necessary, just as it now includes the capacity to confront non-being. Thus, it is Henderson's attainment of authentic being which enables him to recognize that his moment-to-moment struggles are his definition and his means of taking hold of his own destiny. As Ihab Hassan has appropriately commented, "for once the American hero does go back home again,"<sup>8</sup> and Henderson is able to go home with a conviction that "chaos does not run the whole human show" (HRK, p. 341), because he is now able to perceive himself as the subject of what is occurring within his own existence.

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8. Ihab H. Hassan, "Saul Bellow: Five Faces of a Hero," Critique, III (September, 1960), p. 35.

Summary of the Relationship Between the  
Ontologically-Focused Reader and  
Bellow's Persona

To summarize, the existential-ontological perspective allows one to accept through direct experience Henderson's transformation from a state of inauthentic to authentic being. By the end of the novel, one is able to greet Henderson as a being-in-the-process-of-becoming. Like any human being, Henderson has particular prejudices and standards of behavior which he brings to other people, but given authentic being he is now able to greet others individually and to look for their real being that undercuts both his prejudices and theirs. Henderson, in other words, like Willatale, is able to look through the "personal self," through the exteriorities, the masks of others in his existence. By the time he leaves Africa, Henderson's being-in-the-world with another person such as Lily is correspondent to his being-in-the-world with his own psycho-physical make-up. He is able to accept others as persons, not as "objects" identical with their external appearances, habits, or values. Henderson is now able to evaluate and relate to others not in terms of what they say but in terms of what they mean. His being in the world with others, like his being in the world with his body, is characterized by the transcendent qualities of love and acceptance.

One's increasing awareness as the novel progresses is that the tension is between the world and Henderson and not within Henderson himself, except in the moments in which he feels forced to struggle with the world's viewpoint. By the close of the novel, Henderson is no longer overly sensitive to external opinions of his behavior or to his "future" as others perceive it; if he were, he, like his world, would still be tending to identify his real being with a suffering object, a victim of an unfortunate fate. There is, however, no evidence by the conclusion of the novel that Henderson sees himself as either suffering or as an unfortunate victim. To regard the persona from such a vantage is to see him from an ontologically estranged point of view. Throughout his various experiences and actions, the sense of Henderson's real being begins to transform the ontologically-focused reader's attitude into an expression of something other than the comic or absurd pathos of his situation. The key to Henderson's being is to regard his actions with the Arnewi and the Wariri and his appearances--his decaying teeth and massive body--not as signs, but as symbols pointing beyond exteriorities to his particular mode of being in the world. To bring Henderson into focus as the subject and the one who knows himself as the subject of what is occurring ontologically is to recognize that the sources of tension in the novel derive from moments in which one tends to

regard Henderson from an alienated point of view. Thus to look at Henderson only as an object is to be estranged from one's own being, not Henderson's.

Only by approaching Henderson the Rain King existentially, from the point of view of one's stake in it, can one fully understand what the novel is "doing." One must see one's self and Henderson as subjects, as persons in the process of becoming, not as static objects to be identified with some psycho-physical quality. To approach the novel from a detached intellectual or sentimental viewpoint is to end by seeing Henderson only as an eccentric, absurd, pathetic, or comic figure; an entity by whom one feels amused or intellectually stimulated. The reader who regards his reaction to Henderson ontologically rather than intellectually may be described as in a condition of ontological estrangement rather than intellectual stimulation or amusement. Greeting Henderson from an ontological attitude, one is able to realize that he possesses an authentic visionary nature that focuses his real being, and that having fallen from this visionary nature, one (as reader) struggles to discover a way to focus one's own real being. One's embarrassment at Henderson's presence in any given moment derives not entirely from regarding his authenticity from an estranged point of view, but rather from identifying that authenticity with an absurd, comic, or innocent state which does not provide the world with an



adequate vision of itself. Thus one can be intellectually amused by Henderson's behavior, which is expressive of his real being, but still unable to find a behavioral life style expressive of one's own being.

Henderson's transcendence into authenticity by the end of the novel is consistent with Bellow's purpose in Henderson as several critics have cited it: "to affirm not the present individual and the present society but their possibilities."<sup>9</sup> The implied state of spiritual paralysis in contemporary society is expressed in Henderson's early inability to live either in the past or in the present, to move either forward or backward. Rejecting formulistic life styles and traditional doctrines as no longer meaningful, Henderson, in his early experiences yet remains unable to focus the center of his life in a new way. Until the attainment of authentic being, his life remains suspended between two states of being.

Interpreting Henderson from an existential point of view, therefore, adds a dimension to one's experience of it by relating the novel not only to Bellow and contemporary society but also to the individual reader and his own world. Within the ontological dimension of experience, the novel is symbolic, that is, it occurs within the realm of immediate sensory perception, for one meets

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9. Clayton, Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man, pp. 5-6.

Henderson as a person who has a direct effect upon one's own being. He impinges directly upon the sensibilities of the ontologically-focused reader. Given such an attitude, one is not simply a neutral receiver who acknowledges data about Henderson; indeed, what one actually knows about the persona becomes, to a certain degree, a secondary matter. This is not to say what one knows about Henderson is not true, but that such "truths" take on a different significance when they are experienced in relation to Henderson as a person whose being and becoming is in some way linked to one's own.

The analysis of Henderson the Rain King presented in this study differs from other critical interpretations in that it does not concentrate on the pathos of an idealist, that is, a comic or absurd symbolic figure, but, rather on the character of Henderson as it is a reflection of a particular way of seeing. Regarded in this attitude, the intention of Bellow's novel is not to cause the reader to feel intellectually amused or stimulated, but to focus the authenticity of Henderson's being through a life style which appears comic or absurd because it is viewed with detachment born of ontological estrangement. Henderson, therefore, may well remain "eccentric" to those around him, but this possibility is more a mirror of the world's estrangement than it is of his own, for as a character in whom there is no conflict, he has authenticity. On the

other hand, it is the world which has failed to make its own condition expressive of being and which, therefore, tends to react with detached, intellectual amusement to Henderson's "absurdity" or comic idealism or eccentricity, thereby turning his efforts at self-redemption into conflicts. Ultimately, then, the "chaotic" existence of Henderson refers not to his personal condition at the close of the novel, but to a view of life that reflects the spiritual paralysis of an inability to be. Thus for the interpreter, the primary advantage of an ontological perspective is that it allows the reader to focus this particular problem of the persona (and one's self), not in a distanced manner, but simply within the realm of an attitude which attempts, moment-to-moment, to understand where the novel places the particular reader who is in the process of either realizing or not realizing his own being.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINAL CLARIFICATION AND SUMMARY OF THE ONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The intention of the present study, as indicated in Chapter I, has been to approach Bellow's novel from an ontological point of view in order to demonstrate the value of the perspective as a tool of elucidation for the oral interpreter. In order to focus that particular value, the present chapter seeks to clarify the relationship between the existential-ontological viewpoint and other critical persuasions. Also, the following discussion presents perspectives on the relationship between the existential-ontological attitude and the interpretation act.

As has been demonstrated, Bellow's novel, approached ontologically, does not primarily invite nor yield ideas; thus it does not instruct in any literal sense. One takes nothing from the novel that one does not bring to it. What one brings to the immediate experience of the novel is one's own self-awareness and concern with self-discovery. Accordingly, by sensing that the content and substance of Henderson the Rain King has meaning only in reference to the being and becoming of Henderson himself, one is able to encounter the novel as a coherent, unified experience. In short, it is precisely because the

existential-ontological perspective has numerous contemporary applications that this writer suggests its value as a critical attitude. Thus one purposely limits one's self to unsystematic statements of the novel specifically because such statements allow the reader the widest range of interpretation. The successful application of such a viewpoint, in other words, depends to a certain degree on the extent of the reader's existential involvement in what he is interpreting.

Chapter III of the present study has demonstrated that assuming a common concern between reader and literary work--namely, the concern with being, with the human struggle to transcend the sense of alienation from self--results in critical interpretations essentially different from those produced by other critical standpoints; even so, it may help to clarify further this particular perspective by suggesting how the ontological attitude differs, in general, from other critical persuasions. While the writer of the study does not wholeheartedly accept the view of those who may tend to think of literature as being completed only when the "criticism" of it has been written, the half-truth implicit in such a view is that the best critical interpretation is the best reading of a work. Were all literature immediately and absolutely perceived, there would logically be no need for the critic.

Beyond this simple definition of the critic exists, of course, a more complex actuality. Critics divide into as many areas as do writers, and they seem to view their function from nearly as many different points of view. Ransom, as mentioned earlier, speaks of intellectual critics, concerned only with the "ideas" in a poem, as distinct from himself. T. S. Eliot urged a classicism not always apparent in his own poetry; I. A. Richards, as yet another example, proposed a scientific foundation for the analysis of literature. Individually encountered, critics almost always seem to insist upon their own universal particulars. Thus it is fruitless and unnecessary to catalogue them. The very diversity of critical viewpoints, however, serves to establish the fragmented conceptions of critical function. For the purposes of the present discussion, in relation to the existential-ontological perspective, the writer feels it is sufficient to review five general areas of critical activity: formalistic, sociological, psychological, archetypal, and moral. Viewing the ontological approach in relation to these five critical orientations should help determine its affinities with and differences from them.

The first critical position from which the existential-ontological approach needs to be distinguished is the formalistic, which has several branches, variously referred to as aesthetic or textual, and which generally

has been termed the "new criticism." Whereas the numerous critics connected with formalism--Eliot, Blackmur, Brooks, Warren, Ransom, Tate, Empson--exhibit a wide range of literary interests and emphasize different aspects of a work, using different tools of elucidation, such as irony, paradox, tension, texture, ambiguity, and so on, all attempt to talk about what the work is in itself, rather than about how it reveals history or serves moral, psychological, or sociological ends.<sup>1</sup> The ontological approach, in this respect, is similar to formalism in that it avoids seeing literature as propaganda and tends to regard it as symbolic. Both persuasions regard literature as something in itself which cannot be translated into other terms. Furthermore, the ontological approach resembles formalism in that it tends to be concerned with dimensions of a work which cut across literary species and the classifications of literature into groups and periods. Presumably, however, there would be room for the problem of genre within the ontological viewpoint, just as there is within the formalistic system. Thus the two approaches have in common their concern with literature as literature. Paradoxically, however, just within this concern the ontological attitude differs from the formalistic point of view. In

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1. I have drawn from Wilbur S. Scott's Five Approaches of Literary Criticism (New York: Collier Books Division of the Macmillan Company, 1962) for discussions of the areas of critical activity surveyed in this chapter.

order to study literature as it is in itself and then separately as an entity expressive of non-aesthetic social, moral, or religious concerns, one has to determine what an aesthetic concern is, or what it relates to, if one is to avoid falling into the Cartesian fallacy: that something which has being can relate to itself without relating to anything else. Such an assumption leads to the disturbing extension of the formalistic position: the idea that in critical interpretation one never encounters the literary work itself, but only something "about" it. One may, thereby, paraphrase the work or discuss its technical devices, or trace the pattern of its logic or of its imagery, all the while not mistaking such concerns for the work itself. In short, while recommending itself as a method of analysis, formalism as a whole seems to assume finally that the work remains inaccessible. Such an assumption of inaccessibility is what the ontological approach denies.

From the formalistic point of view, then, the heresy of the ontological standpoint is its assertion that one does encounter a literary work directly simply by relating it to one's own being and becoming. Insofar as one encounters a work as an expression of one's own being, one encounters the work itself. The latent and rather complicated assumption, of course, is that one only "sees" as much of the work as one is capable of seeing of



one's own self. In other words, the extent to which the reader is capable of recognizing himself within, but distinguished from, the various roles--social, psychological, philosophical, religious--in which he participates, is the degree to which he is able to encounter the being of a work. One's encounter, therefore, with Henderson the Rain King depends upon one's ability to separate Henderson himself from the various roles in which he perceives himself from moment-to-moment in his struggle to attain a sense of selfhood. Such an ability depends upon one's own recognition of the need to be, to stand out from one's roles by saying that I am the one who adopts this or that particular role in-the-moment for one or another purpose in the immediate moment. This is not to say that one is inseparably related to such roles, but rather that one has the ability and the need to transcend them. Thus it is in the act of transcendence that the reader goes beyond the various elements of which the work is comprised (and the reader is comprised) and meets his own "self" in the wholeness of the work's beingness.

As with formalism, it is possible to clarify the ontological persuasion by indicating its affinities with and differences from the sociological point of view. The ontological approach, like the sociological, acknowledges that a work of art is always, in some sense, an expression of the particular problems and dilemmas of its time.

Encountered existentially, however, a work is not evaluated according to whether it serves some political or economic "truth" (as Marxist critics would judge) but according to how its social "materials" reveal the being of the work itself. Thus the ontological reader is concerned not with how literature serves some specific social end, but, rather, with how it reveals man as a social being, as one who is inseparably connected with his world and who must express his humanity through it.

The difference between considering a work as an expression of social being and as something serving a particular cause may be demonstrated by indicating how the ontological approach views the social concerns in Henderson the Rain King, not as ends but rather as means for revealing being-in-the-world. Though it may be, for instance, interesting to consider the novel in terms of Bellow's intent to illustrate the state of social, moral, and spiritual chaos in contemporary America, it limits the novel considerably to consider Henderson merely as the embodiment of such a state of societal paralysis. Such an interpretation takes no account of the tensions generated in the work by the expression of Henderson's genuineness through a life style inappropriate to his world. Such tensions emerge in the novel only when one considers Henderson as a social being, as one whose way of being-in-the-world is related to one's own. The sociological

persuasion, therefore, contributes to a certain way of seeing that is pertinent to the self of the reader as well as to Bellow's America, or to his Africa of the mind. The novel, on the other hand, suffers considerable restriction when it is contained solely within a sociological persuasion focused toward some particular concept. Approached ontologically, the novel, once again, reveals the participation of all persons (sociologically or otherwise) in a basic existential problem. In short, though criticism dealing with the social concerns in Bellow's novel is helpful in focusing the milieu in which both Bellow and the reader exist, it does not, used as an end in itself, reveal the overall world of the novel in which Henderson is struggling to be within his own particular social context. A critical account such as that of Maxwell Geismar, which argues that Henderson the Rain King can only be interpreted through reference to the course of American realism during the last half-century,<sup>2</sup> only becomes valuable as a means of elucidation if the literary stream it points up relates to Henderson's struggle for personhood. The persona's struggle and achievement of authentic being, as illustrated in Chapter III, is achieved not through such an identification but rather by cutting through the social suppressions of his existence to the ontological basis of his culture.

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2. Geismar, American Moderns, p. 218.

Though it is, of course, important to consider the social context which Henderson struggles within and against, such a concern helps reveal the larger intention of the work only if it is related to the being and becoming of Henderson himself. Thus one could say that the ontological approach transcends the objectives of the sociological point of view, for it does not abstract the social contents of a work, but rather attempts to see how the larger being of the work is revealed through them.

The emphasis of the existential-ontological standpoint on transcendence, on how a work makes itself expressive of being, distinguishes it from psychologically-focused criticism. Often a work viewed psychologically is merely reduced to a symptom of neurosis or it is explained within the context of an example of a certain behavior pattern. Given the psychological persuasion, what it is that makes a work art rather than psychology is often bypassed. The approach, of course, is most valuable in bringing the insights of modern psychology to bear in uncovering the latent symbolism of a work, the motives underlying it, and the motives of the characters within it. As has been demonstrated in Chapter III, the ontological point of view is also concerned with why an author produces a particular vision and with the logic of the persona's actions. The ontological approach, however, unlike the psychological, considers that a novel as a whole may have a

motive which is not identical with the psychology of its persona (or particular characters) or with that of its author. The motive of the novel, ontologically viewed, is what the behavior patterns in the work are related to; it consists in the ability of the work to stand out from its own psychological dimension in the transcendence of being.

A short review of elements from Bellow's novel will serve to clarify how the ontological dimension transcends the psychological. First, if one encounters Henderson the Rain King only in the psychological dimension, then one is apt to dismiss Henderson as merely an eccentric, comic, or absurd figure, whose frustrated emotional life reflects the spiritual paralysis of the twentieth century itself. Furthermore, one may tend to explain Henderson solely as a manifestation of Bellow's negative attitude toward technology or toward progress as a way of life. Such accounts, however, do not account for how Henderson's immediate presence affects one as a person in the world. When one, for instance, encounters the authenticity of Henderson focused within his particularly bizarre life style, one may be left in a momentary state of ontological estrangement, a state of non-being. Non-being, however, is in itself a way of being since one is able to recognize that one is in such a state. Given the vision of the whole novel, then, one transcends Henderson's and one's own psychology by seeing where "I" (as reader) am and where

"I" am not in the problem of giving expression to my own personhood. Whereas it is more difficult to suggest how one may transcend the psychological dimension of Henderson's own particular experiences of grief and jubilation--for the novel invites the reader to see them as expressions of one's own compulsions toward grief or jubilation--yet the novel envisions how such states of feeling are to be transformed, it foresees one's transcendence of psychological alienation in any given moment, not one's containment within it. Finally, as demonstrated in the preceding chapter, viewing the novel as a unified whole necessitates approaching it in a dimension which encompasses the moment-to-moment psychological level of experience. Thus studies of Bellow's novel in which the persona is discussed in terms of his personal psychology, are helpful in suggesting the particular problems that Henderson's personality poses for him; they do not, however, show how the persona redeems his personal nature in the achievement of selfhood. Nor do discussions of the novel as representing wish-fulfillment on Henderson's part consider that the symbolic situations in the work may mirror actual states of being in existence and are, therefore, part of an artistically controlled vision of real, not potential, human experience. To summarize, approaching a work solely within the psychological dimension obscures the work's human quality, which reveals how

one is in one's own psychology, not how one is contained and limited by it.

The critical persuasion most difficult, in certain respects, to differentiate from the existential-ontological perspective is the archetypal, for like the former, the archetypal approach also employs many of the tools of elucidation common to other critical standpoints. As one writer describes the archetypal persuasion:

It occupies a curious position among other methods: it requires close textual readings, like the formalistic, and yet it is concerned humanistically with more than the intrinsic value of aesthetic satisfaction; it seems psychological insofar as it analyzes the work of art's appeal to the audience (in a way, extending Richard's investigations of the poem-reader relationship) and yet sociological in its attendance upon basic cultural patterns as central to that appeal; it is historical in its investigation of a cultural or social past, but nonhistorical in its demonstration of literature's timeless value, independent of particular periods.<sup>3</sup>

As noted earlier, the ontological attitude makes considerable use of various symbolic and archetypal patterns in establishing the relationship between the novel and the reader. Thus Bellow's symbols have an archetypal appeal just as does the technology of the twentieth century personified by the author in various moments of Henderson's life. Furthermore, a major impetus behind Henderson's being and becoming is the archetypal pattern of the quest,

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3. Scott, Five Approaches of Literary Criticism, p. 247.

the journey which forces Henderson (and the reader) to recognize that the search itself has particular meaning. Again, however, archetypal motifs, like sociological and psychological concerns, must be considered within the larger vision of the world of the novel, that is, as means of elucidation rather than ends in themselves. Often a risk inherent in the archetypal approach is the tendency to reduce a literary work to a hunting ground for symbols, which are then discussed more in their relation to one another than to the work itself. Though one might note, for instance, the similarity between the "questing knight" and the "absurd hero" archetypes in Henderson the Rain King, such knowledge, regarded as an end in itself, only points to various writers' concern with the same mythic patterns. The archetypal similarities do not serve to illuminate how such patterns are particularly appropriate to the existence of the persona as a being in the process of becoming. Such comparisons are external to the world of the novel perceived ontologically. On the other hand, assuming a universal ground-of-being, to which the archetypes themselves are related, forces the reader to discuss symbolic patterns in terms of how they help to reveal the particular human dimension of experience on which the work focuses. The most significant moment, therefore, in Henderson's experience--the moment toward which all the various "materials" of the novel are moving--occurs when the "myth"



ends, when the archetypal struggles of the questing knight and the absurd hero both dissolve in the humanization of the persona, reflected in both Henderson's and the reader's acknowledgment of their respective human positions. Thus the break in the novel as myth is the point at which the archetypal patterns are integrated into one's own experience of self-discovery.

The concern of the ontological approach with the human dimension of a literary work establishes a close affinity with the moral approach. Moralistic criticism has the longest history of the viewpoints surveyed in this discussion. Among adherents to the moral persuasion are Plato, Sir Philip Sidney, Samuel Johnson, Mathew Arnold, Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer More, T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis, and Ivor Winters.<sup>4</sup> Such diverse critics share concern with the seriousness of art, with its humanistic and/or religious points of view. Even certain formalistic critics such as Ransom and Tate join with Eliot in considering the "greatness" of literature apart from its aesthetic qualities. In short, moral critics tend to evaluate a literary work according to how successfully it focuses man's freedom to transcend, by means of reason or faith, his destructive and nihilistic impulses. Given this emphasis on the human capacity for transcendence the moral and

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4. Scott, Five Approaches of Literary Criticism, pp. 43-66.

ontological approaches are united. The ontological standpoint could, for instance, adopt Eliot's assertion that literature ought to have an essentially religious point of view.<sup>5</sup> Insofar as Eliot, however, never defined how such a point of view may be recognized or revealed in a specific work, the ontological reader himself must establish the context in a work within which ethical choices are meaningful. The ontological perspective avoids the pitfalls of rigid adherence to the moral persuasion by imposing upon the individual reader the responsibility of indicating the particular ground by which one's morality, as justified by reason or faith, is relevant.

Often the morally-focused critic tends to discuss a work in terms of its ethical contents rather than in terms of whether the work essentially reflects either a moral or ethical point of view. Critics who, for instance, see Henderson only as Bellow's personification of a certain ethical or theological set of concepts, obscure the larger vision of the novel, which illuminates a state of being that is related to their own. Similarly, those who approach the novel as simply about man's fallen condition overlook how the work affects them immediately as an

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5. T. S. Eliot, "Religion and Literature," in Essays Ancient and Modern (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1936).

expression of their own being. Those who limit Henderson the Rain King to an ethical or religious perspective alone miss the real motive inherent in the world of the novel, that is to reveal Henderson's essentially moral and spiritual struggle to be. Focusing on how a work reveals the transcendent function of being would seem to circumvent the risks involved in evaluating it according to a particular ethical or religious content or standard. Moreover, such a concern with how the form of a work is seen through its contents, not apart from them, would seem to undercut T. S. Eliot's dichotomy between what makes a work literature and what makes it great. Insofar as a literary work brings into focus a certain way of being-in-existence, what makes it great and what makes it art are one and the same thing. The ontological approach, therefore, unlike the moral, places emphasis not so much upon how one wins victories over one's destructive impulses by making moral choices based on reason or faith, but on how making such choices depends first upon one's discovering an acceptable way to be. Henderson, therefore, has no choice but to be frustrated, eccentric, and often violent until through Willatale and Dahfu he achieves his own particular humanity. He is, in other words, only free to make ethical decisions when he is able to acknowledge in his own being his ability to make them. Being is a necessity, not a matter of choice and, therefore, it is in the light of how

a work focuses and then realizes this necessity that its moral contents should be regarded. Once again, the existential-ontological approach is concerned with how man stands out from his existence--in this instance, with how he transcends his morality and thereby makes it relevant to himself.

Having attempted to clarify the ontological perspective by comparing and contrasting it to five other areas of critical activity the writer now summarizes the fundamental tenets of the approach with a degree of confidence. Assuming, first of all, a degree of depth in the literary work itself, the existential-ontological concern asserts that a direct encounter between a work and its reader is not only possible but that such an encounter may be discussed without damaging the work's literary value. Secondly, the existential-ontological attitude asserts that the encounter depends upon the reader's approaching a literary work from the point of view that he has a personal stake in it, that is, from the standpoint that the work is actually about himself. The reader, in this respect, enters the work not through rationalistic exteriority or sentimental identification, but, rather, through a self-critical attitude which seeks to establish how the work focuses the transcendent quality of being. The final assertion of the existential-ontological perspective is that the success of the concern's application depends upon

the degree of self-consciousness of the reader, the degree to which the reader is able to distinguish himself from his own assumptions and roles in the perpetual unfolding of his own being in the world. Although most areas of critical thought acknowledge the necessity for an extensive degree of self-consciousness in the reader, the quality is particularly important in the ontologically-focused reader. The only inescapable premise such a reader brings to a work is that he exists and that he has a need to be. Consequently, the more one is aware of the various ways in which one's being is and may be revealed, the more one will be aware that literary art expresses being through an infinite variety of materials. The high degree of self-conscious involvement required by the existential-ontological perspective, however, does carry a degree of risk in that it involves immediate self-discovery, moment-to-moment, on the part of the reader and forces the reader to "live" the work. Should a given reader be unable to sustain the all-important act of transcendence and separate himself from the role to be undertaken by the approach, the result would be useless. Certainly, the existential-ontologically-focused reader must be able to hold self-realization and literary-vitality in clear, balanced perspective. Whereas such risks may seem remote from the standpoint of the areas of criticism surveyed, they are, given a valid existential-ontological persuasion, quite real. Within this

perspective, focusing the being of a literary work, one is actually focusing the essence of himself--not merely something "aesthetic" and exterior to that self. An acknowledged limitation of the existential-ontological approach is, therefore, that the solitary, individual reader will, doubtless, attain varying degrees of success in employing the approach according to his own particular existential rapport with a variety of specific literary works. The application of this viewpoint, in other words, depends to a certain degree upon the extent of reader's existential involvement in what he is in-the-moment interpreting. In short, the literary works which one is best able to understand are those with which, in any given moment, one has the most ontological affinity--those which touch one's own deepest concerns. The uniqueness of the existential-ontological point of view is that while it disparages making statements about literature, it does not seek to isolate a work as an entity which is inaccessible to the reader because it is unrelated to anything other than itself. Since the ontological attitude seeks to unite the being of a literary work with the being of the reader, the ontologically-focused reader will doubtless be drawn to and have most success with those particular literary works which deal specifically with where that individual reader is in the process of his own state of being and becoming.

On the other hand, the advantage of the existential-ontological viewpoint, properly employed, is that it avoids the shortcomings of critical persuasions that characteristically talk "about" literary works in terms of pre-selected formulas or systems, thereby obscuring them with various subjective and unrelated distanced impressions. The existential-ontological perspective, on the other hand, is an approach to literature which has an inherent propensity to keep the reader's relationship to literature immediate and vital because it makes that relationship dependent upon the individual reader's continued state of being-and-becoming-in-the-world.

As stated early in this study, the existential-ontological attitude toward literature is well-suited to the experiential act of Interpretation. Like literature, Oral Interpretation is a presentative art form in which something is created that results from the particular reader's response through his own being to that of the persona of the work. Thus the interpreter functions as a creative auxiliary artist who, in a sense, shares the vitality of being existent in the world with the author in the moments of performance. Interpretation thereby may be viewed as an act characterized by the living reality of reader, author, and persona joined in an immediate experience of world. All of the theories of Interpretation surveyed earlier acknowledge the importance of artistic

sensitivity. Inasmuch as a function of authenticity (in the self of both the performer and the literary persona) is to reveal insight into the nature of reality, sensory responsiveness to things-in-the-world and to their various appearances is essential. Sensitive response and moment-to-moment apprehension of the literary and life experience constitute the element of discovery inherent in the Interpretation act. Leland H. Roloff confirms the importance of the discovery process to the art of interpretation:

The Oral Interpreter is an artist, not a craftsman. Whereas in a craft, the craftsman knows what he wants to make before he makes it and the end is prior to the means, in an art there is discovery. In art craftsmanship is depressed; in the artistic experience there is a sense of discovery and revelation which takes place through expression.<sup>6</sup>

Since the art of interpretation is occurrent, that is the reader's medium is temporal, the aspect of discovery is not completed within the sole realm of the reader's function as presentative artist. Given an existential-ontological perspective, the reader as being-in-the-world simultaneously discovers, creates, reveals, and communicates literary meaning. Drawing from the discussion of Iradell Jenkins, Roloff explains this simultaneity in terms of "compresence."

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6. Leland H. Roloff, "A Critical Study of Contemporary Aesthetic Theories and Precepts Contributing to an Aesthetic of Oral Interpretation," Diss. University of Southern California, 1968, p. 429.



The concept, according to Roloff, is essential in maintaining integrity within the self of the sensitive reader and within the realm of the literary work itself.

The auxiliary artist is creative in the sense of this compresence: the compresence of his appreciation for literature, his abilities of expression, and his capacity to confer an existence upon the work of literature in an interval of time. In short, the compresence achieves the aesthesis for the auditor. The compresence of performance is the mark of the artist-interpreter's intelligence. In deciding what "propertied objects" in the work of literature to reveal, he is asserting his own life of intelligence, he is acting<sup>7</sup> upon the dictates of his own sensitivities.

As in the existential-ontological attitude toward literature, a fundamental basis of the interpretation process is that a reader's discovery process is a responsive-imaginative act. This is not to say that a lack of awareness of literary structure or form in any way facilitates such a response on the part of the reader. Often one's ability to recognize, in-the-moment, paradox, for example, increases the spontaneity of one's response. In The Art of Interpretation, for instance, Wallace A. Bacon sets out to increase the interpreter's awareness of the manner in which literary forms reflect the coalescent, perspectival, and presential characteristics of reality. He demonstrates how poets create tensiveness through juxtaposition of scene-summary-description and point of view in prose fiction, through conflict in drama, through

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7. Roloff, "A Critical Study," pp. 416-417.

denotation and connotation, and through comparisons involving sound, sense, and imagery in all literature. Writers in interpretation, Bacon and others, have long held to the assumption that one's awareness of literary form facilitates response. An existential-ontological attitude does not refute the importance of such knowledge. Rather it suggests that in a first encounter with a literary work, an interpreter should approach the work in what could be termed a humanistic and non-preconditioned attitude. Such a stance merely suggests that a reader suspend engagement with elements of literary form and structure until he has been able to greet the being of the work as an expression of itself and of the reader's own being-in-the-world. Given the existential-ontological attitude, an interpreter, during the duration of his performance, would then be more able to feel his being self as actually participating in an occurrent nexus with the experience of the being self of the persona. Such immediate-moment participation is not outside of the realm of aesthetics which strives to clarify the nature of responsive pleasure in artistic encounters. In discussing the aesthetics of interpretation, Roloff, for one, endorses the concept of "Einfuhlung [which] is ultimately the enjoyment of self. It is the experience of being pulled into the 'life' of the art object to the extent that there is a

temporary unawareness of self."<sup>8</sup> Thus insofar as a reader's ontological engagement is with the existential rather than with the structural or conceptual, and since emotive and psycho-physical elements figure into such immediate participation, he may gain both intellectual insight and emotional perspective in the experience.

Given the existential-ontological concern, the reader, therefore, does not merely recognize various formulistic relationships but rather reacts in-the-moment out of the insights and intuitions of his own being. At the same time, he should be able to maintain a creative awareness, making aesthetic decisions relevant to the embodiment of his immediate-moment encounter. Employing the existential-ontological attitude, the reader is able to sense transcendent dimensions of reality through his moment-to-moment encounter with the literary work. Participation in structured experiences involving subjective and affective elements, for example, could within the ontological perspective evoke new understandings of the relationships between the cognitive-affective experience of one's being-in-the-world.

Ultimately the medium of the interpreter is his "life," his "self," his presence, his being. The wholeness of life in the reader can never, however, be actually

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8. Roloff, "A Critical Study," p. 419.

revealed in a given moment of performance, because when that "life" is observed for any span of time its being-in-the-process-of-becoming is contained by a "doing." This is not to suggest that Interpretation is merely a presentational activity, rather, it is symbolic because it contains a referential dimension of both being and meaning. The interpretative reader does not designate meaning, he reveals meaning as it emerges in the encounter with the being of the persona in the literary work. Given the existential-ontological attitude, the interpreter does not seek to eliminate ambiguity but rather allows the presentation its freedom in the moment. The freedom is not to be regarded as wholly indeterminate but as open to the full play of intuitive and associative responses that emerge in all prior moments of contemplation and rehearsal and in the moments of actual performance as well. Insofar as the interpreter is capable of bridging the split between himself and the persona as subject-object-focused, his performance may well be ontologically both self-intentive and self-transcendent because it represents particular meanings at the same time that it also points beyond them. Given an ontological standpoint, the interpreter functions simultaneously as both experiencing perceiver-participant and as living symbol; he becomes a coalescence of tenor and vehicle, an experiential unity of the abstract and the concrete. Ontologically perceived, the interpretative act

thus stimulates and promotes within the reader an awareness of being-in-the-world, an understanding of truth and reality different from that gained through exterior analytical or formulistic methods. Unlike analytical approaches demanding decision, the whole nature of what the ontological attitude brings into existence as the reader greets the persona is a mystery, challenging being, one's present-moment sense of reality, and, simultaneously, inviting all intuitive associative responses of which one is capable. Thus within the ontological view, an interpreter stimulates in varying degrees a continuing state of anticipation throughout the performance. Within the act of interpretation, the ontologically-focused reader is in essence always anticipating the next moment, always leaning into the future--engaged in the process of becoming. Thus the ontologically imaginative-responsive reader has the potential of articulating through performance a new and individual perspective on reality. Because of such a reader's unique response to the "reality" of the being of the literary persona, his own particular empathic participation in the essence of that reality, and because of the aesthetic choices involved in his particular embodiment of the whole experience, the act of interpretation reveals a unique, untranslatable perspective on reality. The various actions of the performance bear the immediate and personal stamp of the interpreter as a unique person in the

process of being and becoming. Thus the existential-ontological attitude is congruent with the interpretation act because it presents an intimate knower-known relationship, and grounds methodology in actual experience. This is to say that whereas knowledge of a particular literary work cannot be an end in itself, knowledge gained from the first-hand experience of the work should proceed from each new encounter. Only within the actuality of one's own personal existence-in-the-world is true universality possible. Thus the interpretative act provides an experiential rather than conceptual way of knowing.

In summation, the existential-ontological attitude holds perception to be the sympathetic participation in whatever experience the literary work reveals, before or even without the distillation of sense statement from it. As a critical concern, the attitude assumes certain possibilities: (1) emotional and physiological responses in the reader represent an important area of truth and significance; (2) human understanding, therefore, is only partly rational; (3) rational statement cannot represent total truth; and (4) certain elements of experience are only meaningful when directly experienced. The existential-ontological attitude, in short, attempts a total view of experience. The concern holds justification not only in the vitality of the reader but in the vitality of the world of the literary work itself--a world which often

fragments along the lines of a particular methodology or technique to engage the reader in specialized areas of response. The existential-ontological attitude is symbolic; it attempts to extend the immediate participation in a literary work into multiple function. The concern, therefore, is not only the fact of one's conclusions drawn from circumstance, it is the circumstance in as many immediate and qualitative ways as existence can be sympathetically encountered.

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